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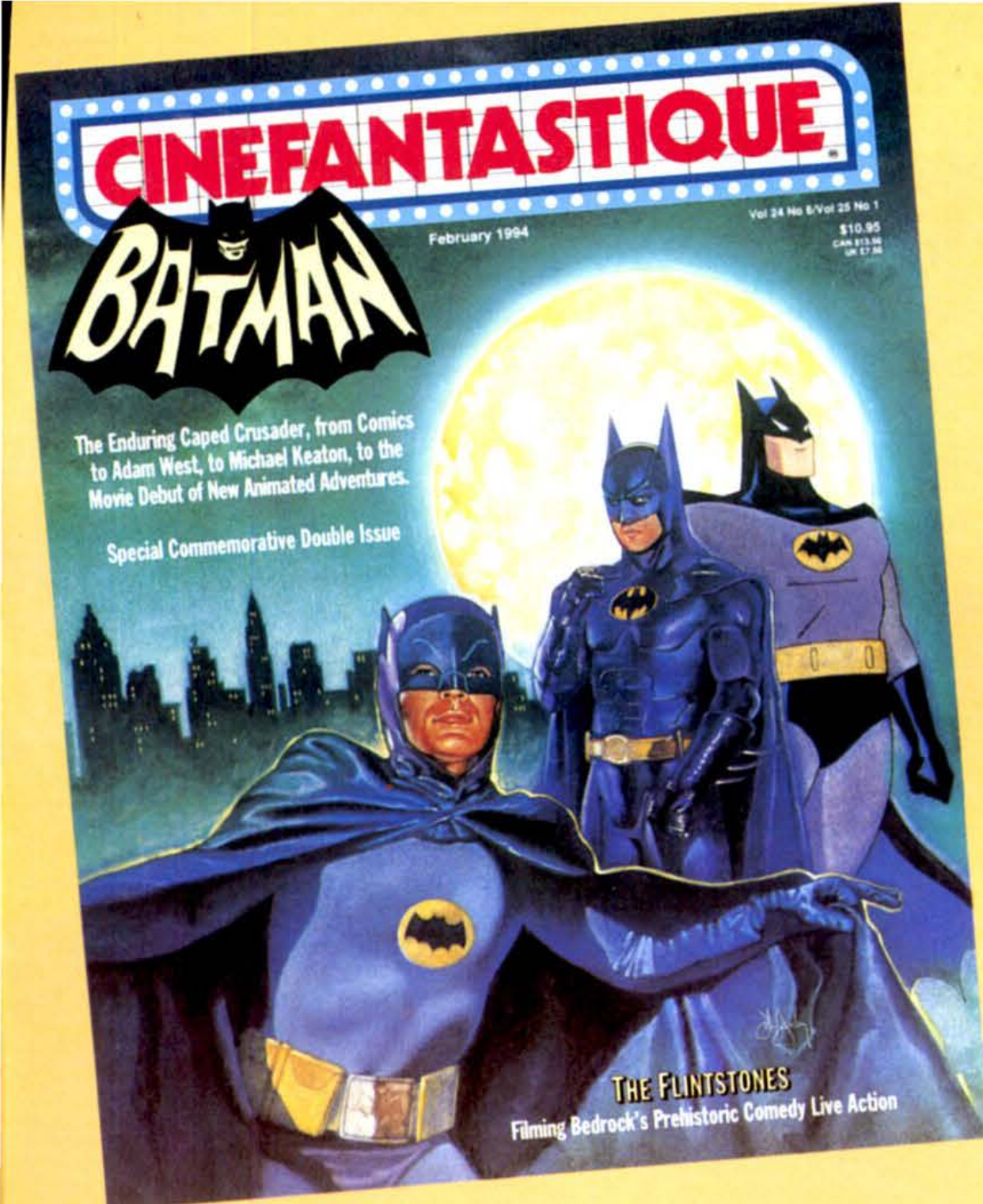
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Mindy Clarke, a  
ghoul to die for.

Volume 1 Number 2







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# CINEMAGINATION

"*Imagi-Movies* should be a... 'can't miss' proposition for B-film addicts," says my learned colleague at sister publication *Femme Fatales*. Unfortunately, he falls into the trap of using "B-film" to mean—well, I don't know what it means, and neither does anyone else. Like the word "race" (when used to signify a group of people), the term is one which everyone uses but no one defines.

As Roger Corman (the so-called "King of the Bs," who actually never made a B-movie in his life) points out for the umpteenth time in a recent interview, B-movies were the less expensive bottom halves of double-bills in the '40s, shot on major studios. The closest equivalent we have today are made-for-TV-movies, which are also studio projects without hefty above-the-line costs.

So why object to using the term to mean "low budget"? Because no one uses it that way anymore; instead, the phrase has degenerated into an ill-defined pejorative. This started when William K. Everson, in *Classics of the Horror Film* tagged *THE EXORCIST* a "B-film with a budget." In a 1979 article entitled "Hollywood's Scary Summer," *Newsweek* picked up on the usage in reference to *ALIEN*. And even a *Femme Fatales* editorial referred to *BASIC INSTINCT* as "an expensive B-movie." The implication of all of these statements is that B-status has less to do with budget than something intrinsically disreputable in the material. No one has ever called *SEX, LIES AND VIDEO TAPE* a B-movie in spite of its low cost; instead, it's an "art" film, because it's not science fiction, fantasy or horror.

So why are we genre enthusiasts continuing to use a phrase which implies that *cinéfantastique* is automatically suspect, no matter how well done? I have no idea, and that's why you won't be seeing the term in the pages of this magazine anymore. Depending on what's accurate and appropriate, words like "independent," "exploitation" or "low budget" will be used.

All this is by way of saying that *Imagi-Movies* will not be a "can't miss" proposition for so-called B-films. I simply do not subscribe to the romanticized notion of low-budget filmmakers as artists uncorrupted by Hollywood bucks. In truth, they're mostly hacks waiting for their big break into the majors, which has not (and probably will never) come. Furthermore, although behind-

the-scenes articles about working with little money are fine, reviewing films according to their budget is a bit absurd, with its implication that audiences are somehow getting more for their money. Maybe this form of reviewing makes sense in legitimate theatre, where lavish stage productions charge higher ticket prices, but when one invests seven dollars in a movie ticket, the budget, quite simply, doesn't matter. The bottom line is that, as much as possible from now on, films will be covered in these pages because they are *worthy* of our attention, not because they are cheap.

That does not mean we will ignore low-budget or obscure films; we will cover as broad a spectrum as possible: big and little, old and new. The basic model for *Imagi-Movies* is the old *Cinefantastique*, before its pages became glutted with *STAR*

*TREK*. Each issue will try to balance coverage of new projects with retrospectives on classics, and we will try to provide as much critical perspective as possible, even if that ruffles a few feathers. You might say *IM* will be a synthesis of *CFQ*, *Film Comment* and *Film Threat* (but without the latter's sophomoric attempt at "attitude").

If we have a mandate, it is to cover worthwhile material that does not get into *CFQ* or *FF*. A glance through the contents of this issue will reveal names like Dario Argento or Barbara Steele that you might have expected to see in one or the other publication. But don't bother looking in these pages for "press kittens" willing to doff

their clothing for a little free publicity. We will profile people, men and women, because they have contributed significantly to the genre, not because they look good in lingerie. Also, it's safe to say that *IM* #1 will be the last to waste so much space on Stephen King. With Anne Rice's *INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE* going before the cameras, it's time we set our sights on a writer with considerably more talent. If there's an overriding principle to *IM*, it is "Emphasize the positive, but don't hesitate to be negative." We want to find space for work that amazes genre fans, whether or not it's as popular as *JURASSIC PARK*. At the same time, we shouldn't be afraid to take an iconoclastic approach to "Brand Name Horror" that no longer deserve brand name loyalty. □

BY STEVE BIODROWSKI



Two generations of genre talent, *DRACULA*'s Florina Kendrick and director Gordon Hessler (right), celebrate Halloween with your *IM* editor.



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# SINISTER SENTINEL

## TELEVISION

There was a time when writing a column about science-fiction television was just a more sophisticated-sounding way of talking about STAR TREK as nauseam. Fortunately, for fans whose hunger for compelling and innovative sci-fi is not satiated by a 24th century bill of fare, the 1993/94 television season boasts some intriguing alternatives. to the NEXT GENERATION star trekkers.

● NBC's big-budget SEA QUEST is the network heavyweight in the one-hour drama arena. Unfortunately, despite lavish budget, expansive sets, and polished CGI effects, the story of a futuristic submarine exploring and protecting the Earth's oceans appears to be a turkey. Its two-hour premiere, written by Rockne O'Bannon and Tommy Thompson, is a rehash of every tired and true genre cliché ever seen on the tube and even throws in the feuding ex-husband and wife team of THE ABYSS for good measure. Despite the lackluster start, NBC and Steven Spielberg's Amblin production company remain optimistic about the series' future.

The man responsible for salvaging SEA QUEST is David Burke, veteran of WISEGUY, CRIME STORY AND TRIBECA, some of the small screen's best dramatic fare. Joining the show after Rockne O'Bannon's departure (for personal reasons) and Tommy Thompson's resignation (after allegedly repeatedly clashing with Roy Scheider over the show's tone), Burke is the man who will be responsible for whether the show sails—or sinks. "The course I set is different than the course set by other people," he says, planning to eschew the one-dimensional comic book tone of the pilot by focusing on boldly exploring the undersea world where no sub has gone before. "I lean much closer towards Bob Ballard, because I'm really fascinated by the science. I wanted desperately to write something I could sit and watch with my children."

Science consultant Dr. Robert Ballard is quick to point out that he finds the dramatic possibilities in traversing the earth's seas far more compelling than charting stellar seas in other futuristic series. "We're really exploring the last frontier—and I think it's the ocean," says Ballard. "What you're going to see is people going under the sea



The two-hour pilot of SEAQUEST DSV sailed past LOIS & CLARK: THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN, but will future episodes sink or swim?

as the human race colonizes the other 80% of the earth."

● Battling SEA QUEST for the airwaves and not the oceans, is LOIS & CLARK: THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN, a decidedly updated version of the classic mythos. "In the comic books and the features, the main thrust is that Superman arrives in Metropolis to fight for truth, justice, and the American way and takes on a disguise as a mild-mannered reporter," says series creator Deborah Joy LeVine. "In our version, what we have is a young man by the name of Clark Kent who really wants to live a normal life, even though he did come from another planet, and who does, in the course of the pilot, find a disguise for himself, in the Superman outfit, so that when he needs to, he can help people."

Cast as the man of steel is 90210 heartthrob Dean Cain, an ex-pro football player, and the curvy Teri Hatcher is a liberated Lois Lane. The writers are pushing the MOONLIGHTING-like chemistry, and Robert Butler, a veteran of that romantic comedy, is a creative consultant on the new show. As for Supe's battle with Spielberg's super sub, Joy LeVine comments, "I think that there will be people who will turn on the show because it is Spielberg, but I think that LOIS & CLARK brings so much more to the public. There's a history there, and I think people feel that history. They want their kids to watch the show the way they watched the show. I think once they

come to the party and see these fantastic people and the great cast that we have, they'll stay."

● It's a thrill being a cartoon freak," says actor Joe Piscopo about his role as the Dogfather on the all-new, talking PINK PANTHER, in which Matt (MAX HEADROOM) Frewer gives voice to the titular classic laconic hep cat. Adds Piscopo of his voiceover gig, "It's the thing to do in Hollywood. It's quick and it's fun." Watch out Joe, that's what they were saying about Heidi Fleiss—until recently.

● Bravo is rearing the classic MAX HEADROOM series as part of their TOO GOOD FOR TELEVISION series, which last unearthed TWIN PEAKS for the TV Lynch mobs. HEADROOM, which predated WILD PALMS—and virtual reality, for that matter—is one of the most unfairly overlooked sci-fiers in the history of the genre. If you can, catch it when it airs this fall.

● Universal tries to outdo Paramount with their syndicated action network programming. Starting in January, the studio unspools four two-hour telefilms, including William Shatner's TEK-WAR novels with Greg Evigan as Jake Cardigan, Shatner's two-fisted hero. Other genre fare includes John Landis' FAST LANE, a sci-fi KNIGHTRIDER in which two unlikely heroes get a supercar from spacey aliens, and Sam Raimi's updating of HERCULES.

● From our "Believe It or Not" file: Seattle-based fans threw a huge shindig in Los Angeles this

## EDITION

October to tub-thump the 15th anniversary of BATTLESTAR: GALACTICA. Despite those who would thumb their noses at the 1978 sci-fier, the more well-respected NEXT GENERATION boasts several GALACTICA alums, including production designer Richard James, who served as art director on BG, and helmer Winrich Kolbe, who not only directed "Baltar's Escape" but was an associate producer on the pilot. Even Q, John de Lancie, had a two-line part in BG's "Experiment in Terra." Says Kolbe of his stint, "I didn't hang around for the one-hour episodes, because we couldn't deliver the level of quality that the pilot promised. In those days, it took weeks to do the opticals, and you couldn't maintain that. A couple of space shots was it—everything else had to be done with the characters, and the scripts weren't geared for that." According to Steven Simak's new book GALACTICA: REVISITED, the 35 Cylons cost about \$3500 each, and the director of "The Young Lords" episode marched 20 of them through a swamp, permanently sidelining the old rustbuckets when they filled with water and other assorted goop.

● Tamilyn Tomita, Blaire Baron and Patricia Tallman are out; Claudia Christian (as the Russian second-in-command), Julie Nickson (as Commander Sinclair's new main squeeze), and Andrea Thompson (as the telepathic Lyta Alexander) are in—in orbit, that is—in Warner Bros' new weekly syndie offering, BABYLON 5, which premieres this January. That means our sister pub's "Women of BABYLON 5" piece is zero for three. Could there be a *Femme Fatales* curse?

Mark Altman

The innovative MAX HEADROOM re-runs this fall, on the eclectic Bravo's "Too Good for Television" series.





# ATTACK OF THE 50 FT. WOMAN

**HBO-TV remakes one of the greatest science fiction posters of the 1950s.**

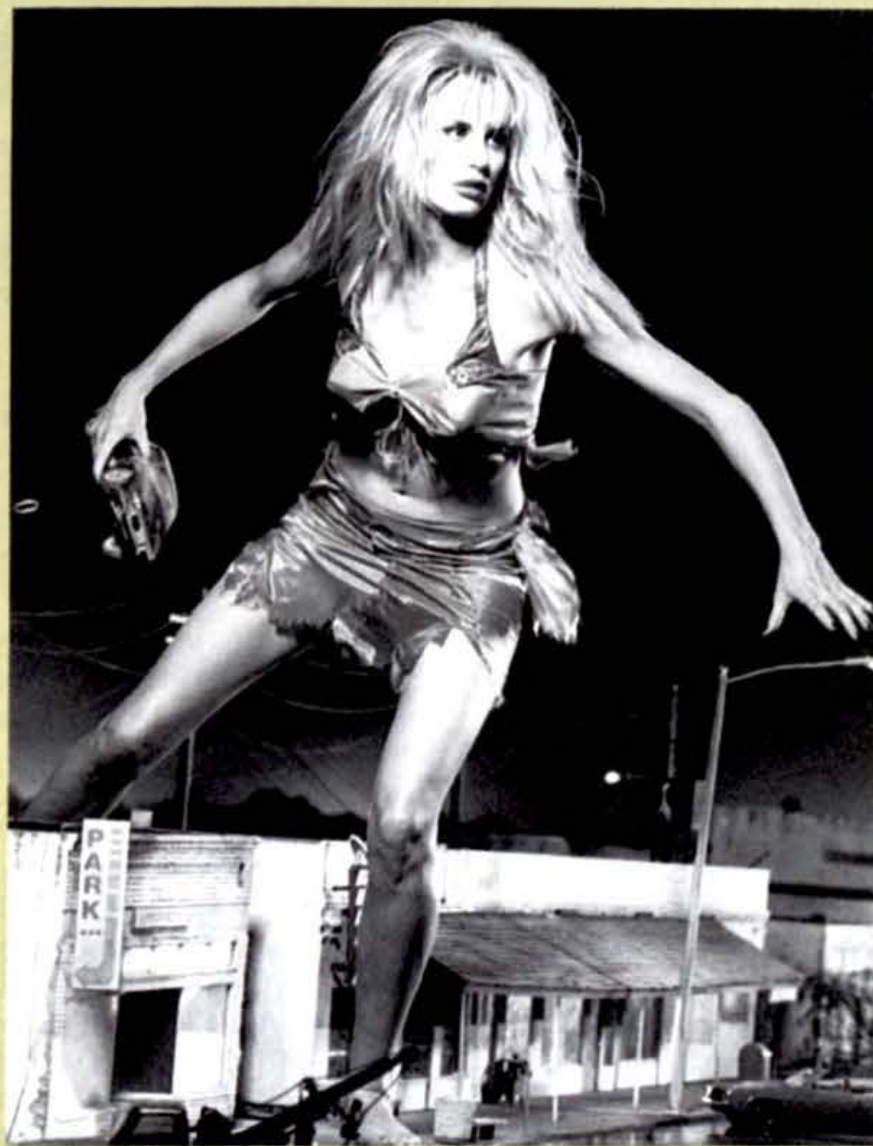
*By Mark Altman*

Why remake a film if the best thing about it was its one sheet? In the case of the infamous *ATTACK OF THE 50 FT. WOMAN*, writer Joe Dougherty (*CAST A DEADLY SPELL*) believes it was a chance to improve on an inept original. "The classic quote is John Huston's: 'You don't remake the good ones; you remake the bad ones and fix them. With all due respect to the Woolner Bros., *50 FT. WOMAN* needed a lot of fixing."

According to the spinmakers at Home Box Office, where the telefilm will premiere in December, the cult classic has been updated with a distinctly "feminist twist." It seems hard to believe that the '50s original, which consisted of Allison Hayes being enlarged by radiation from a flying saucer and trampling over a town in search of her two-timing husband, is the fodder from which morality plays are spawned.

Star Daryl Hannah, a woman who has suffered the very indignities and abuses the film reportedly tackles, comments, "It's a comedy first of all. It has a message in there that could be called 'feminist' if you want to call it that. Basically, it's supposed to be fun."

According to the writer, however, the special effects-laden film depicts the fear of feminist empowerment by many males. "Since it comes out of the '50s, you're dealing with male paranoia," says Dougherty. "It's saying that, to a lot of men, any woman who's empowered is monstrous. It isn't saying that somebody who finally gets empowered is vicious and horrendous. It's got nothing whatsoever to do with the reality of the situation. Most '50s science fiction movies were like that, and it



Daryl Hannah stars in the title role of HBO's *ATTACK OF THE FIFTY FOOT WOMAN*, an allegedly feminist reworking of one of the very worst science fiction movies ever made.

could be broken down to the line, 'We don't understand it. We'd better kill it.'"

While Dougherty admits to a certain affinity for the original film, snidely commenting, "If you saw the movie at the right hormonal point in your life, Nancy Archer sticks with you," Hannah was less familiar with the 1958 anti-classic.

"I'd seen the poster and the t-shirt, but I didn't see the [original] film until halfway through production," she says. "I was surprised the film was only 45 minutes long and that there wasn't the same story as ours. In fact, there really

wasn't story at all. In the original, she was a bit of an alcoholic and a shrew, and in our version my character is very passive and demure and quiet at first, and then evolves into a more self-confident, assertive woman."

In order to pad out the first film's sparse running time, Dougherty incorporated another plotline in which Nancy Archer's (Daryl Hannah) father, Hamilton Cobb (William Windom), attempts to have his daughter incarcerated in a mental asylum and secure her business interests for himself. Much of the rest of the film, including Nancy's unfaithful spouse Harry's marital infidelities, are faithful to the original movie. And even though it's the '90s, fans of our sister publication, *Femme Fatales*, will be sad to know that Archer still manages to cover herself with attire suitable to '50s sensibilities.

The film shot for 38 days of principal photography in and around Los Angeles, with a post-production period of eight days of miniature shooting and three days of blue-screen filming. Overseeing

the special effects was Fantasy II's Gene Warren Jr. (*TERMINATOR II*), who resorted to traditional effects techniques to visualize Hannah's startling transformation.

"We didn't have a lot of money, but it was my intention to use the kind of effects that are very old: forced perspective and splits, which have been used for 40 or 50 years," says director Christopher Guest (*THE BIG PICTURE*). "We didn't have the money to go to computerized effects afterwards, and there is a different look to this."





**Top:** The new version delivers some of the action only promised by the original poster. **Right:** Hannah realizes that she is not in a remake of *CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND*.

Several scenes utilized forced perspective, including one in which the enlarged Nancy Archer dines with her six-foot husband (Daniel Baldwin). Hannah was placed on a platform 15 feet in the air in front of a miniature barn, surrounded by models of trees and a truck, which make her appear huge during close-ups. In two-shots, she was in the foreground, speaking to Baldwin, who was atop a real truck, 25 feet in the distance.

The technique was also used for a scene in which Archer bathes in her fa-

ther's swimming pool. In addition, complete miniature sets were built for her climactic rampage through the city. Although Hannah had worked with prosthetics in *SPLASH*, which took nearly five hours to apply, the precision of this film's visuals, she found, were nearly as time consuming. "When we were shooting the miniatures, we spent a lot of time because the lighting had to match exactly the lighting of the real town. That stuff seemed to be the most difficult and

continued on page 61





# Dario Argento's TRAUMA

**The giallo director delves into the depths of his own soul.**

*By Alan Jones*

A long-suppressed hospital malpractice surfaces from the depths of a maniac's subconscious, marking a group of medics for murder in Dario Argento's **TRAUMA**. Argento popularized the *giallo* violent thriller format in Italy with **THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE**, **CAT O'NINE TAILS**, **FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET** and **DEEP RED**. Fans will recognize many familiar themes and stylistic links to the latter film; however, Argento prefers describing his \$7 million probe into the dark side of brain disorders, drug addiction, altered mental states and gynecological gore as "Deep Soul," explaining, "Usually, my stories come from articles in newspapers or things I hear on the streets. Not this time. It's from deep down inside myself."

Argento began thinking about **TRAUMA** in 1989 while wrapping **TWO EVIL EYES**, the Edgar Allan Poe two-parter he co-directed with George Romero (who dubbed him the "Gauguin of Terror"). During a short break in Boston, Argento was brooding over an anorexic niece. "It's a terrible mental illness," he says. "It's a call for attention with many dark psychological connections, and I thought it would make a good



Posing with a figurine that plays a part in the killer's psychosis, Piper Laurie stars as Aura's domineering mother, the psychic Adrianna.

starting point for a suspenseful whodunnit."

The early treatment was known as **MOVING GUILLOTINE**, a reference to the murder weapon; later, it was retitled **AURA'S ENIGMA**, after the anorexic protagonist who holds the key to the killer's identity. Originally, the murderer was obsessed with the French Revolution (hence, the decapitations and a startling scene, embroidering on the apocryphal Marie Antoinette tale, wherein a head whispers

a clue in the last throes of dying), but this was dropped in favor of a more specific motivation. These disparate themes and outrageous plot lines, including a seven-year-old boy murdering his neighbor and a hallucinogenic berry unlocking hidden memories, finally came together as **TRAUMA** when Argento enlisted the collaboration of T.E.D. Klein, whom he knew as editor of *Twilight Zone* magazine and author of the horror novel *Ceremonies*. It was from Klein's seventh draft screenplay that Argento shot **TRAUMA** in and around Minneapolis last summer, with Asia Argento, Piper Laurie, Frederic Forrest, Christopher Rydell, Brad Douriff, juvenile actor Cory Garven and **DALLAS** actress Laura Johnson. (Argento buff Bridget Fonda originally had the latter role, but bowed out after "creative differences.")

Asia is Argento's daughter by **DEEP RED** star Daria Di Colodi, who also co-wrote **SUSPIRIA**. Having recently won raves for her role as a sexually abused teen in the Cannes Festival hit **CLOSE FRIENDS**, Asia notes, "Dario said he was really jealous I'd worked with practically every Italian director, apart from him. In honesty, I was worried—scared to death, actually—about doing it. He was so







mean to actress Cristinal Mar-sillach while making OPERA—I didn't want to be put in that position. It's been a lot better than I was expecting, and he's never shouted at me once."

On location at the Irvine Park suburb in the Mini-Apple's twin city of St. Paul, where the key illusion concealing the assassin's identity was secretly shot in the "Seance House," Argento proudly described his daughter as the "New Anna Magnani." Another person impressed with Asia's abilities was Piper Laurie, who confided to Argento that she was a naturally gifted actress. "Don't tell her that, for heaven's sake—she'll be impossible to live with!" was Argento's shocked reply, according to Laurie.

An Oscar-nominee for CARRIE and Golden Globe-winner for TWIN PEAKS, Laurie plays Aura's domineering mother, psychic Adrianna Petrescu. "Horror is not my favorite genre, and I'd barely heard of Argento before being offered the part," she remarks. "But I had a good learning experience with DePalma on CARRIE. I never knew where the camera was going, and it greatly enhanced my performance, adding another dimension above what I was doing." She adds, "The TRAUMA script is very intriguing, and Dario's extraordinary camera movements are unlike anything I've ever seen before. I'm anxious to see the finished film, because it will be extremely unusual, visually."



Hiding his face behind the heads of his latest victims, the serial killer is glimpsed but not identified.

Laurie locked horns with her director only once, over what she considered an alarming script change. "He wanted the murder weapon to sever my head through the mouth," she recalls. "That wasn't in the script I first read and contractually agreed to do. I preferred the simpler decapitation method, less inventive for Dario, perhaps, but right for me." Otherwise, working with Argento was a dream. "The best directors are the ones who hire the correct people for the job and leave them to do it," she points out. "Dario falls into that bracket." In truth, Ar-

Left: During a seance, Adrianna claims her psychic powers have revealed the identity of the murderer. Bottom: Argento directs Laurie in the scene.







Aura Petrescu (Asia Argento) and David Parson (Christopher Rydell) find themselves trapped in the killer's lair.

gento was slightly in awe of his star. "She's incredible," he says. "Piper just opens her mouth and this wonderful light, language and performance flows out!"

Appearing in *TRAUMA* solely as a result of Laurie's performance is Frederic Forrest, star of five Francis Ford Coppola movies. Having never heard of Argento, Forrest took the role of psychologist Dr.

On location, Dario Argento and crew line up a POV shot of a hat box, which contains more than a hat.



Judd because he wanted to work with one of his favorite actresses. Only when he told his nephew, a die-hard Argento fan, that he was working on "some movie called *TRAUMA* with another Italian" did he realize the significance of the Argento name. Judd runs the clinic where Aura, taken for her eating disorder, is given an exotic psychotropic fruit to jog her memory about her parents' murder. "I'm definitely in the mad doctor tradition," remarks Forrest, who could be seen walking around downtown Minneapolis at all hours to get used to a neck brace he insisted on wearing as part of a backstory he invented for the character. "I know it made Dario speechless, but that's my Stanislavsky training," he says. "I feel the neck brace subliminally gives the impression Judd wants to keep his head on his shoulders. Some of my lines are extraordinary—the monologue about the head containing the soul, for example—but I'm honestly not camping it up. I'm playing it dead straight."

"Every *TRAUMA* shot means something," says Argento. "All the interiors represent the human body, the warped psyches of the characters, and are purposely cold,

depressing and gloomy. The exteriors are contrasting bright blues and yellows. It's mostly experimental and my darkest film to date." Just prior to *TRAUMA*, Argento directed an air deodorizer commercial, in a replay of directing a Fiat promo before starting *OPERA*. "I made it solely to test a new micro-louma crane that simulated flight from a butterfly's point of view," he explains. "It's a technique I used in surprising ways here, too. That's why American technicians are the best in the world. In Italy, they are unwilling to try anything new; in the States, they say, 'Sure, go ahead,' and their enthusiasm

is infectious."

Steadicam operator Kirk Gardener is one of the crew members who was willing to try out any Argento suggestion. "Thirty percent of *TRAUMA* is spontaneous Steadicam," he says. "Many shots were at floor level, with huge closeups of door knobs and knives when I doubled as the killer subjectively. The visuals act as clues to the maniac's identity, more than the script in many ways." Helping Gardener achieve these fluid, low-level swoops is the production design of Billy Jet, which not only allowed space for camera movements but also cheated size. "Everything from the 'killer closet' to the 'cellar prison' were raised a foot and designed to hide the maniac's face until the very end," according to Jet.

These trademark Argento flourishes are not based on the saturated color palette of *SUSPIRIA*, according to cinematographer Raffaele Mertes. "Dario loved my use of natural light for *THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER* [which Argento produced] and asked me to come up with a believable *film noir* look for *TRAUMA*—sophisticated, reality, with a touch of fantasy." Mertes created a '40s-style monochromatic look by using a special printing process called EMR, "that washes down colors, like the effect you get turning down the color adjustment on your television set."

"Everything you'll see in *TRAUMA* is saying something new and profound," according to Argento. "Because it focuses on internal emotions, I

Vision obscured by rain, Aura, like many Argento protagonists, catches a deceptive glimpse of the killer, but can't quite remember what she saw.





# TRAUMATIC

## BRAD DOURIF

*The voice of Chucky loses his head over working with Dario Argento.*

By Edith Sorenson

Brad Dourif had a jolly time working with Dario Argento on *TRAUMA*. He plays the doctor whose "wee accident" drives a patient into homicidal psychosis. Describing Argento, the actor says, "He is just Italian, you know? His arms move around, and he just takes off when he tells you something. He's incredibly emotional and expressive physically."

In Dourif's amused recounting, his director is not like many Americans who go on about "inner work" and other serious theories. "Don't get me wrong: he knows what he's doing. I am just not used to seeing somebody direct like that," says Dourif, "but I've been working with a lot of first-time directors and, boy, was it a delight to see somebody who instinctively knew how to stage and how to use the camera and for whom everything all worked together. He's a natural. His staging all makes sense for acting."

At least when Argento's vision calls for acting. "Dario does some out-there camera angles. He is very straight ahead about that," adds Dourif, acknowledging that, when working in the director's audacious visual style, "You know it's camera first, acting second, because the camera angle is really telling the story; the actor isn't."

Fun stuff. Also fun were the effects used for the doctor's untimely demise. Dourif claims he "quite enjoyed" having his face covered with a "rubbery kelp product" and his head encased in a wet plaster cast, dubbing the experience as "very peaceful, like a form of meditation." The doctor's decapitation also required a blue-screen shot of the actor wrapped in matching blue material, with only his head exposed. Dourif suggested a fan blowing on his hair, to simulate a fall down an elevator shaft, "and I make lots of faces," he laughs. "I hope it's an amazing

shot."

*TRAUMA*'s malpracticing physician is only the latest of dozens of unique characters the actor has created since his Oscar-nominated film debut in *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST* (1975). Over the following two decades, he has become a favorite of high-brow directors like Milos Forman and Werner Herzog, but he has also played genre roles ranging from the reflective writer of *GRIM PRAIRIE TALES* to the demonic Gemini killer in *THE EXORCIST III* ("one of the best pieces of writing I've ever had the pleasure to act," according to Dourif).

Ironically, this on-screen embodiment of the alienated other is, at home, closer to Ward Cleaver—happily married, with two daughters. Oh, there may be one unwholesome note: perhaps one of his two pet cats is a little odd. "I think the kids tortured it when it was young," he says casually, then drops an octave and intones, "They drove it mad. They did terrible things to that cat—I'd constantly find it in doll clothes."

Not a very big skeleton in the closet, considering the actor's intense screen persona. There are other surprises: Dourif has enjoyed a life-long love affair with all types of movies, except one. "My biggest problem has always been with horror

In *TRAUMA*, Dourif plays a small role as the former doctor whose long-forgotten medical malpractice is responsible for the killer's psychosis.



"One of the best pieces of writing I've ever had the pleasure to act," says Brad Dourif of his role in *THE EXORCIST III* as the Gemini Killer.

movies, simply because they scare me," he says, adding with a shrug, "and I wound up doing a lot of them." The actor grudgingly took his 10-year-old daughter to see his performance as the reconstructed artist in *BODY PARTS*. "I knew she was going to want to leave, and I was delighted when she did."

The older daughter is already a worldly moviegoer. In fact, the 15-year-old provides guidelines for her dad. Citing her review, he says he has no plans to go back and see the rest of *BODY PARTS*. "She said it was scary," he explains. "That's enough for me, because I can't sit through even the movies she *doesn't* think are scary."

This seems like a contradiction—an actor best known for his unnervingly accurate portrayals of the twisted and the damned can't sit through a simple bogeyman movie. He isn't a bit shy about this. "Tobe Hooper is a friend of mine, and I've never seen *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* and I'm not going to. I've seen excerpts from it, and it is terrifying," says Dourif. But, if Hooper had asked him to play Leatherface, "Sure," he says, "I'd do it in a flash."

According to Dourif, watching is frightening while being in



character is, well, simply being. "If you're going from the point of view that somebody is a piece of meat," the gentle father of two explains, "then they are a piece of meat. But, if you are watching someone who has an attitude that somebody is a piece of meat and he doesn't know it—that's terrifying."

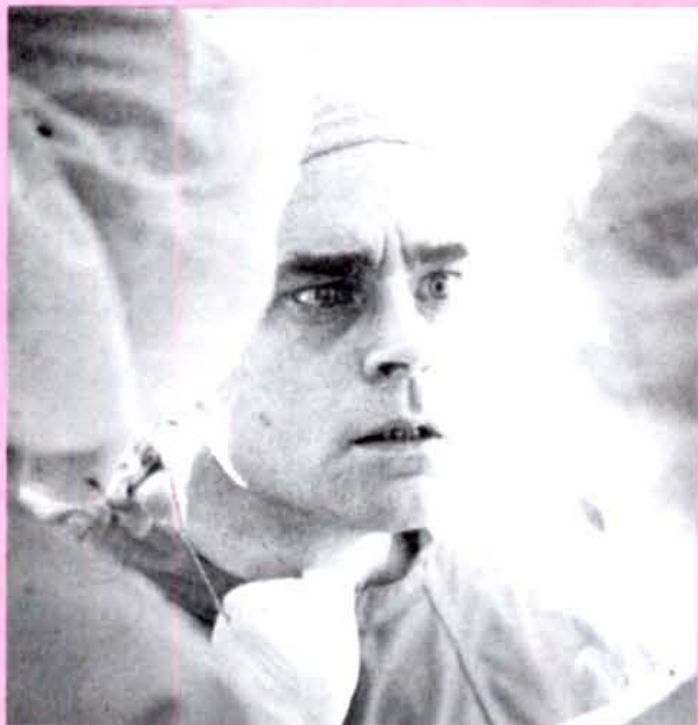
On the subject of horror films, Dourif says that "they have a style that is different from anything else. You should never take a horror film seriously, unless somebody is doing something incredibly serious with it. I always see them as something a little bit larger than life. They always go out to a point of absurdity, where you can't even imagine anyone really being like that."

Actually, Dourif's performances always make it easy to imagine someone being like that. Dourif brings evil home by reminding the audience of Pogo's dictum, "We have met the enemy and he is us." He reveals the soul of each character—that stunted part, "nailed down and writhing in torment." That soul is, always, unmistakably human, and it demands sympathy.

As Joni, his wife, puts it, "Only the pure can portray evil." Family and fans recognize Dourif's characters are compelling because he makes us see something of ourselves in each—which he is able to do because he sees all people as equal. Dourif snorts at this interpretation. "If I were really non-judgmental, I'd be an enlightened master, and of course that's not true."

Still, even for derivative characters, Dourif has some sympathy. In his thought-

At the climax, the killer's flashback reveals the horrible accident that befell Dourif's Dr. Lloyd during the delivery of a baby.



## DOURIF ON HORROR

**"Horror films have a style that is different from anything else. I always see them as larger than life, to the point where you can't imagine anyone really being like that."**



Dourif's supporting role as a rat exterminator was one of the few pleasures of GRAVEYARD SHIFT, one of the many abysmal adaptations of Stephen King.

ful drawl, the classically trained actor claims no strenuous research went into the Chucky character from CHILD'S PLAY, whom he terms "just a generic bad guy," but he adds, kiddingly, that the Good Guy doll "really likes his work."

So does Dourif. His career has been busy, but he hasn't always had the jobs he wanted. Horror-wise, he has played almost every role except the most obvious. To date, the unfortunate priest in ABC-TV's I, THE DESIRE (1982) is his only bloodsucker. How is it possible that this beautiful actor, with his patrician profile and cat-slanted eyes, has never been cast as a gothic vampire? "No one ever asked me," he sighs. "You have no idea how much I'd love to do one." Overall, however, he doesn't remember the parts he didn't get. "And that's most of the parts," he says. Despite his early successes, he cheerfully reports that even then, "I had a lot of rejection, like everybody else, and since then it's been a lifetime."

Acting is not Dourif's only gift. "I love teaching," he says, "but there is no way to get poorer faster." Former students remember never missing classes, but a few accuse him of being deliberately intimidating. "He has a habit of running his hand over his forehead and into his hair and leaving it there, and then he just stares at

you," recalls Vic Chandra, who admits Dourif taught him how to observe and understand people. He also insists, "Brad has to know he is intimidating—he uses it, I think."

When charged with intentionally intimidating students, the softspoken gentleman replies without hesitation, "Yes, I really came down on some pretty hard...at times." Dourif expected students to "come to terms with the fact that they really have to be right there and expose themselves." Being scared and resisting was "fine and understandable." A few, however, would stubbornly insist, "You can't do this to me." Then, he says with savage glee, "I would turn right around and say, 'Oh, yes I can!'" Sincerely, he believes it forced them to use parts of themselves that they would never otherwise have tapped. "I did intimidate some students, but most of the time we were just hard at work."

Meanwhile, Dourif continues to play a variety of genre parts. In February, we was seen as Chicky Stein, the Einstein of virtual reality, in WILD PALMS, the TWIN PEAKS-derived soap opera set in a possible future Los Angeles. Recently, he played an obsessive-compulsive character treated by Bruce Willis's psychiatrist in COLOR OF NIGHT, directed by Richard Rush (THE STUNT MAN). "It's a thriller, done by somebody who has a definite out-

there point of view," he explains. "It's a comment on group therapy, but we're not doing real group therapy—at least, I hope not! It's a dysfunctional group at best." Currently he is working in England on an as-yet untitled science fiction thriller about a mad genius who invents a killing machine that hones in on people's fears. Perhaps it's British prejudice, but Dourif is again cast as the villain, whose nationality is unmistakably American. "Not only am I a mad genius—I am also American," he laughs. "What could be worse?"

Playing mad geniuses may not raise his mainstream star as high as appearances in JUNGLE FEVER and WILD PALMS, but fame is no big deal. "It's nice," says Dourif. "You're having a bad day, and someone comes up and says, 'You were great.'" It's also nice when European directors call up with jobs, but what Dourif really wants to do is new things in American movies. "The thing Americans really understand about film is that sense of wonder," explained the movie-lover. "I just want to go someplace new." □



wanted *TRAUMA* to be less bloody, less violently graphic, and more suspenseful, more thought-provoking. I wanted to shock people with a neo-realistic glance at the monster lurking within us all and to confront them with strong images from the dark sides, their hidden interiors. I hoped audiences would understand the horrendous trauma of the events that brought about the killer's psychosis. I hoped they'd be sympathetic, even though they may not be able to watch it unfold. I wake up at night scared by the things in this picture, because they are so close to me. Is it my usual story and one of my fans will be comfortable with? Let's say I'm not dwelling on the cutting edge of the knife so much as the glint of the blade!"

Unfortunately, the glint wasn't enough when *TRAUMA* opened in Italy this May, to largely unfavorable reviews. Because an unrestricted rating category made it available to every age group, Argento lost a major audience segment, hardcore horror fans who figured it couldn't possibly be gory enough. Poor returns, and less-than-enthusiastic American film market screenings, will probably doom the film to the distribution black hole that has swallowed his previous five films. (*SUSPIRIA* was his last hit—in 1977!)

While the AMF print already ran seven minutes short of the 109-minute Italian original ("Just the tops and tails of scenes—nothing substantial was cut," according to Argen-

to), the Overseas Filmgroup will certainly exercise its right to further cuts in an effort to make *TRAUMA* more saleable. A depressed Argento says, "When Overseas first saw the picture, they said the first hour was terrible—too slow and boring—but the second half was fine, because it contained stylish violence." But after the screening, they reversed themselves: the first half was fine and the second half problematic. "They want most of Cory Garven cut out," laments Argento. "They'd leave him in the finale but chop every other scene. It would make nonsense of the picture. Who's this kid who ap-



Top: Argento tries the "moving guillotine" on for size. Left: Dr. Loyd's past finally catches up with him. In this case, the mechanical guillotine malfunctions, forcing the killer to use a convenient elevator as an alternative means of decapitation.

pears from nowhere to take control of the climax? If I paid too much attention to all this, I'd go mad."

Which is why Argento has chosen to draw a veil over *TRAUMA* and move on. He is currently developing a new horror thriller, tentatively titled

*STENDHAL'S SYNDROME*, with Bridget Fonda. (The two have apparently settled their creative differences.) Stendhal, the French equivalent of Charles Dickens, suffered from a rare illness. "When some people view a painting in an art gallery that's an absolute masterpiece, they are so overcome with emotion they pass out," explains Argento. "In Florence, up to 30 people a week are afflicted by this peculiar sickness. Stendhal was the first person it ever happened to, the reason why the condition is named after him."

"I've often gone crazy and had hallucinations when surrounded by great art," Argento continues. "Basically, I want to explore the Stendhal relationship between art and people. When you look at a painting, you have something in mind. But how different are you after viewing it? What if your soul radically changes? Is it impos-

sible to remain the same person? I feel there's a real argument for perceiving evil in a masterwork and reacting to it. It might just be a little detail in the corner, but it could have the most powerful and catastrophic effect."

Basically this is what will happen to Fonda's character, according to Argento. "She'll view a hellish Bosch landscape and then adopt his personality; dress like him in a long scarf, become self-destructive, mutilate her face, skirt madness and turn assassin. Computer graphics now mean Bosch-like surrealist special effects can be successfully brought to the screen. Dreams and nightmares can come to life without inhibitions. Our imaginations now have no limitations or restrictions, and what was once impossible to depict is well within the reach of the film artist." □

Laurie with Frederick Forrest, as psychiatrist Dr. Judd, whose experiment inadvertently unearths the buried memory that drives the killer to murder.





# Clive Barker

# HELLRAISER

**The “future of horror” on “presenting” a horror film, and future projects.**

*By Jay Stevenson*

What's in a name? Money, for one thing. Producers and distributors know that, if their budget is not enough to supply big production values, a famous name is the next best way to attract audience dollars. In the case of HELLRAISER III: HELL ON EARTH, putting Clive Barker's name above the title makes sense—he did, after all, create the series—but just what does “Clive Barker Presents” mean? The low-budgeter was shot independently, with Peter Aitkins (HELLRAISER II) and Tony Hickox (WAXWORK) writing and directing respectively. When Miramax picked up the film for distribution (under their Dimension banner), Barker made some post-production contributions, though how extensive they were is probably not as important as using his name in the credits to promote the film. In fact, when Paramount threw a press soiree to announce the video release of the unrated version, Barker was invited, but neither Hickox nor Aitkins were. (They found out and attended anyway.)

Over lunch, Barker took the opportunity to explain his limited involvement. “At the beginning, I was not invited to the party, or the invitation got lost,” he joked. “As the picture came closer to being finished, it was a question of Miramax wanting to contribute, so they invited me in to view a rough cut and



Top: Clive Barker gives good interview, but he wasn't on the set of HELLRAISER III, so we had to run this shot from NIGHTBREED. Left: Tony Hickox, who actually directed Part III.

talk with Tony and Pete about adding some new material. They wanted, I guess, the possessory credit, and I said I would do that as long as they gave me certain controls. It was quite a lot of extra money, for a lot of new bits and pieces, mostly effects.”

Despite his minimal contributions, Barker claimed to be happy with the result. “I like all three HELLRAISERS, for different reasons,” he stated. “I think one of the interesting things is that each one is an expression of its director's sensibility: the first one is mine, the second one Tony Randel's and the third Tony Hickox's. I think that empowers the series. The movies can be fresh and new, instead of mechanical reproductions of

what came before. I think Tony had a much tougher problem than Tony Randel or I had, because there's familiarity, and familiarity with monsters doesn't breed contempt—it breeds ease. A horror movie is supposed to be distressing to you, and if you've seen this guy three times, the power to distress and disturb is much diminished. I think you need the shock of the new, and the success of that in the HELLRAISER series has something to do with the articulateness of the (Pinhead) character.

“The interesting thing about a number of the monsters of the '80s is how inarticulate they were,” continued Barker. “Candyman and Pinhead come along, and boy are they loquacious. I think audiences

like that. At the end of the day, you're still throwing Christians to the lions—that's the professional responsibility of the entertainment we're supplying—so it doesn't do to get too pretentious.”

Barker also took the opportunity to plug his projects currently in development. Chief among is *not* the previously announced THE MUMMY, first of a proposed series of Universal remakes. “Mick Garris and I did a script, but it was a little too weird for Universal,” he explained. “One of the problems is that, unlike vampires or the Frankenstein Monster, the mummy is one of the least likely characters to scare you. So our version only used the mummy as the starting pace for something else, which was very grim.”

Instead, Barker has several other projects to keep himself busy. “HELLRAISER IV will hopefully go before the cameras before the end of the year,” he said. “This is a HELLRAISER movie such as you've never seen before. We're actually taking the mythology places it hasn't gone. We're going to see Pinhead in some situations we haven't even remotely seen him in. We've got female cenobites, and we're determined that somewhere down the line the Black Pope of Hell himself is going to get laid. I'm also preparing CANDYMAN II. Bernard Rose is going on to do another project for me at Propaganda Films, so we're looking at other directors to take over the reigns.





And here at Paramount, with Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall, I'm doing a \$22 million animated feature based on *THE THIEF OF ALWAYS*. If you watch the stuff on television, which is where children's imaginations are increasingly being stimulated, there does not seem to be much imaginative life in it. My feeling was, maybe I could bring my brand of imagination to fiction for children. We hope to make something that will work like a classic Disney cartoon, only for the '90s. The book is very much about children being able to make decisions between Good and Bad. As long as the fables take children to a place where the reader says, 'Evil was rejected,' then I think the road to that conclusion can be as rocky and scary as you like. We're in pre-production now, so we're hoping it will be out Halloween of 1995."

With the family-oriented *THIEF OF ALWAYS* and the chilling but less graphic (than *HELLRAISER*) *CANDYMAN*, it might seem to some fans that Barker is expanding his audience by moving away from being the "future of horror." Could it be that he has run out of "new ideas" for the genre? Such is not the case, he claimed. "*CANDYMAN* and *THIEF OF ALWAYS* can

Left: Bradley's articulate cenobite in *HELLRAISER* became the star of the franchise. Below: Terry Farrell confronts new cenobites in Part III.



In Part II, Bradley's "Lead Cenobite" returned in an expanded role, now designated "Pinhead" in the credits.

reach an audience that wouldn't go to a *HELLRAISER* film, and the books I've done recently tend not to be horror fiction," he admitted. "However, I am doing another *Books of Blood* collection and I'm writing a sequel to the book on which *HELLRAISER* was based—this will be Pinhead's first appearance on the page, because he isn't even named in the original. My feeling, though, is that the real division in the arts is not into horror-fiction, fantasy-fiction, and science fiction, but into imaginative fiction and non-imaginative fiction. One of the things I will never do is write about adultery on campus or male menopause. I will always write about fantastical stuff. Bernard Rose said, 'If my life depended on it, I couldn't make *ORDINARY PEOPLE II*,' and I couldn't either. My brain doesn't work that way. The weird shit keeps coming in all the time. I used to think everybody was playing around in the same areas. Now I think there are some people who have strange chemical stuff going on in their heads, which is like a low-grade delirium. Fortunately, because I make these movies, I'm not a danger to society!" □





# RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD PART III

## Director Brian Yuzna reanimates the

*By Steve Biodrowski*

The living dead are back once again. Not the flesh-eating zombies from George Romero's NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD trilogy (tetralogy if you count the remake directed by Tom Savini), but the brain-eating sub-species created by Dan O'Bannon for the ersatz 1985 sequel RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD. Since the critical and commercial failure of RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD PART 2 in 1987, the tangential series has moved from Hemdale Pictures to Trimark, which seems to be developing a corporate policy of producing follow-ups to films originated by other companies (WARLOCK: THE ARMAGEDDON, GLASS SHADOWS: CYBORG 2). In keeping with this strategy, RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD 3 has few returning personnel, either on-camera or off, and maintains little continuity except for the mythology established by its predecessors.

Although Tom Fox is again credited as executive producer, the new installment is produced by Brian Yuzna and Gary Schmoeller and directed by Yuzna, who previously moved into the director's chair on SOCIETY and BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR after produc-



Makeup artist Chris Nelson poses behind zombie Clarence Epperson. Tom Rinoni (right) supervised the effects work.

ing Stuart Gordon's early efforts, RE-ANIMATOR and FROM BEYOND. The screenplay is by editor-turned-writer John Penny, who, having helped cut Part One, is one of the few returning crew members. Make-up and/or mechanical effects are the work of five separate teams, supervised by Steve Johnson, Tim Ralston, Kevin Brennan, Chris Nelson, and Wayne Toth. The produc-

tion design is by Anthony Tremblay, whose previous venture into zombie territory was Sam Raimi's ARMY OF DARKNESS. The cast includes genre veteran Sarah Douglas (Ursa in SUPERMAN I and 2); Kent McCord, known to television audiences as Martin Milner's younger partner in the series ADAM-12; and newcomers J. Trevor Edmund and Mindy Clarke. Prin-

cipal photography took place last year at Santa Clarita Studios in Valencia, not far from the suburban housing tract where much of Part 2 was lensed. The 24-day schedule for the \$2-million effort lasted from October through November, resulting in some long hours and short tempers. Believe it or not, the cinematic monster-makers couldn't even get a Saturday night off on Oc-




## living dead.

tober 31 to celebrate Halloween!

When Trimark hired Yuzna, the company did not have a specific direction in mind; instead, they were looking for him to come up with an idea which they could approve. "Trimark got the rights from Tom Fox and asked me if I would make the picture," explains the producer-director. "The great thing was, nobody gave me a script and said, 'Do this.' They were nice enough to let me be involved in picking a writer and developing a story. Certainly, I wasn't just let go to do what I wanted; everything had to be approved. But 90% of the creative stuff they approved. They're very hands-on, and I've enjoyed working with them; ultimately, I think they were very helpful and supportive."

Yuzna, in turn, set about selecting a writer from Trimark's approved list. Says Penny of landing the job after having edited Part One, "It was sort of an amusing connection when they were looking for a writer—there was the title RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD on my resume. I met briefly with Brian, came up with a storyline, and pitched the idea. Luckily, he said, 'Sounds great.' Then we hashed out the script, working very closely



Mindy Clarke as Julie, the film's zombie with a soul, decked out in makeup and costume by Steve Johnson's XFX.



# LIVING DEAD PART III

## PRODUCTION DESIGN

*Expanding the budget  
with modular sets.*

**By Steve Biodrowski  
and Dennis Fischer**

Anthony Tremblay came onboard RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD III after designing TICKS, which was produced by Brian Yuzna. Besides dressing existing locations, the production designer was asked to create sets for the military installation and the underground sewer tunnels where much of

graphics to suggest different levels of security. That saved a lot of time and made the facility look immense."

"The idea was to have a very low-tech but modern facility, and the only thing high-tech would be the electronic equipment," adds Yuzna. "The modular stuff is a great way to go—not just cheap, it's efficient. It allows you to design sets so you can do more with what you have."

For master shots of the facility, a miniature was built by Dave Sharp, based on Tremblay's illustration. To composite actors into some shots, Tremblay cut out portions of the model and used it as a hanging miniature, with full-size set pieces in the background. Crew members who thought they noticed a similarity, dubbed the miniature installation Moonbase Alpha. "I actually am a fan of SPACE: 1999," Tremblay admits. "I guess the panels might look a bit similar, but Moonbase Alpha radiated out from a central point; this one is cubicle. Moonbase Al-

pha, though, was basically ripped off from 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. Hopefully, people will see the originality in this."

The sewer setting was a series of tunnels, modeled after a storm drain location. "Because they're so generic, we could change camera position and lighting and it seemed like a different section. To open up the scene, we made a Sewer Junction and another room just off of that called the Pump Room, where the Riverman lives. Unfortunately, we never had the money to build the whole ceiling, so we opted for a more claustrophobic look, filling it in with machinery. It didn't come out as interesting as the design, which had all these religious overtones."

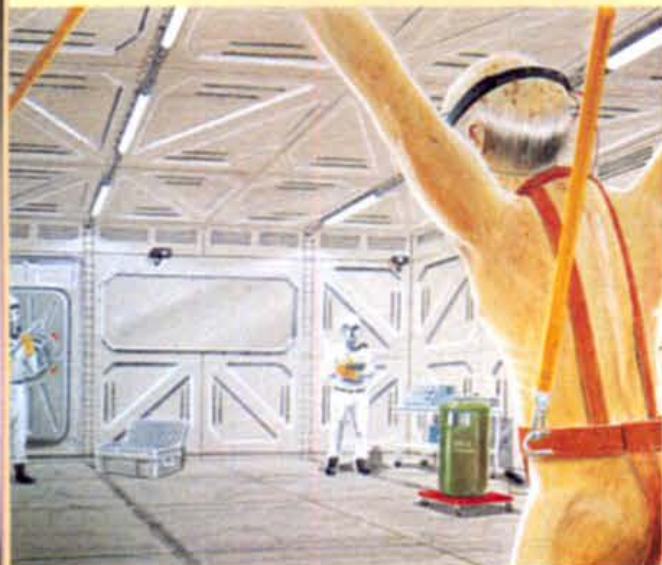
According to Tremblay, Yuzna's low-budget experience was a big help. "He was under the same pressures we were, and he knows how to get out of trouble," says the designer. "He knew what he wanted to see, and we did several sketches. Once those were approved, I



made a study model, which was really valuable, because he wanted some sets very tight and some larger, to accommodate the action he was shooting."

"Each time I do a movie, I get more convinced that it's important to design the sets for the action," Yuzna explains. "I remember a quote from Hitchcock which said, 'Once you design the set, the blocking takes care of itself,' and I tried to think that way. On the most basic level, if the set is a hallway, you know people are either going to go this way or that way. So I tried to stay away from

continued on page 61



One of Tremblay's designs for the military installation: guards keep a watchful eye on a captured zombie.

the action takes place. "The budget being what is was, the trick to both of those was making pieces that were interchangeable," says Tremblay. "The government installation sets were all made out of a series of seven different types of modular panels, which joined together with the same configuration of bolts. So you could put them together into any shape—the sets were always cubicle, but you could go off at any 90-degree angle. Of course, we painted them different colors and used different



Left: Tremblay's modular design for the corridors. Below: On the real set, writer John Penny completes the composition, in a cameo as a guard.





together; there's a lot of Brian in it. I wrote a bunch of treatments, and had very little time to write the script itself; in fact, I was rewriting during production. The fun thing about it was that it was definitely going to made. I've spent time in Development Hell, as they call it. This was a great opportunity to write it and shoot it in a short time."

"I felt very daunted by the task of making another zombie movie," adds Yuzna. "My God, aren't there enough zombie movies out there? But I liked O'Bannon's film, which had a great set-up which was seriable: you could throw a canister of this gas anywhere and have a new movie. My approach was that I wanted Part 3 to be brand new and different, but I also felt an obligation to deliver stuff that you expect, so people wouldn't feel cheated. Like we have the requisite arms punching through the door business—if I go to something called LIVING DEAD and they don't have arms coming through the door, I'm gonna feel like I didn't quite see a zombie movie. The one thing I could think of to make it new and different was to make the main character a zombie, which I think in DAY OF THE DEAD they started doing and, to be honest with you, with BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR I regretted that the bride died so quickly. So I felt there was an opportunity to change the formula."

"I've done a lot of sequels, and except for BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR, I've never had to carry on characters or satisfy any requirements," continues Yuzna, whose only obligation was to use the Trioxin gas invented by O'Bannon, in order to justify the title. "The rules are that the gas brings the dead back to life. We added that if you got bitten by a zombie, the saliva was as lethal as the gas—which I always thought was in NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, but on closer scrutiny it's never explicitly stated. Other than that, I figured that the military would use these things as weapons, so we added that they developed a bullet that will paralyze their nervous

## ZOMBIE VIOLENCE

**"There are certain things that I wouldn't want to do—I'm talking about violence in movies," says Douglas. "This is so far beyond anything real that I don't mind."**



ADAM-12's Kent McCord and SUPERMAN II's Sarah Douglas play colonels determining a military function for the reanimated brain-eating corpses.

system: they can thaw them out, let them loose on an enemy, and then freeze them after they've done all their damage. The colonel played by Sarah Douglas wants to put exo-skeletons on them, so you basically have robots run by 'meat' batteries."

One of the rules not to Yuzna's liking was O'Bannon's way of distinguishing his living dead from Romero's. "I've never been fond of the brain-eating, which he emphasized, but I think it's intrinsic to his [version]. I always liked the idea that the dead just ate people," says Yuzna. "I did come up with an explanation for why they want to eat brains: they need the electricity from the neurons, so they want to eat nerve tissue, and the brain is the best part; that would also explain why they would eat flesh, because there are nerves everywhere."

With only this backstory, and no continuing characters or plot lines, Penny had to build a new script from the ground up. He avoided the structure of the previous RETURN films, which were basi-

cally satiric variations on the theme Romero established in NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (a small band of human survivors barricade themselves against the encroaching undead). Instead, his script features a lead character who must adjust to life (if that is the right word) as a zombie—a plot device vaguely similar to DEAD HEAT (which, coincidentally, also featured a Steve Johnson make-up). "I thought, 'What would I want to see?'" explains the screenwriter. "The first thing was it might be interesting to shift the emphasis away from the victims and toward the living dead themselves. Second, I created a central, simple love story between a guy and a girl—it just so happens the girl is dead. It's a ROMEO AND JULIET/SID AND NANCY tragedy. It evolved from there, and I didn't worry about what Trimark wanted, just what I wanted."

The plot this time revolves around Curt and Julie (played by Edmond and Clarke), two teenagers happily in love until Julie dies from a broken neck

in a motorcycle accident. Curt's father, Lieutenant Colonel John Reynolds (McCord), is supervising the military installation developing the living dead into soldiers; Curt, without thought of probable consequences, sneaks his dead girlfriend into the laboratory and resurrects her, with predictably disastrous results. Julie, as audiences could have warned, awakens with an unsavory new appetite.

"It's a very selfish thing—Curt doesn't want to go on without her," explains Clarke, whose character deteriorates over the next ten hours into a brain-eating zombie. "We joke about the fact that Trevor's character sees me kill people and eat their brains, yet he keeps saying, 'I'm not going on without you!' When we talk about it like that, it's very funny, but they're kids, so we can get away with it—they're naive, and they act without thinking."

**A**ccording to Yuzna, the film's biggest creative challenge was not evoking laughter with the lead character. "The hardest thing was making the audience sympathetic to Julie, who is both our monster and our love interest," he says. "Our whole movie depends on it, because

November 1988 Playboy Playmate Pia Reyes poses in scalded zombie makeup by Kevin Brennan (HOWLING IV & V).





it's a love story, and I think it would have been really tough if Mindy Clarke hadn't done such a good job. Once you see this, you'll say, 'Wow, that girl's a star!' People's eyes are going to open up on her—she's a major talent. That fact that she was able to pull that off basically made our movie work."

Yuzna believes that audience identification with this character will lend a morbid tone beyond anything seen in the previous film. "The scene in the O'Bannon film, where they talk to the zombie and it says it hurts—that was disturbing," he says. "This film has more disturbing stuff, because the main character has an angle to her that's very twisted, psycho-sexually." Yuzna is referring to the bizarre antidote Julie uses to stave off her new hunger, resulting in a surreal appearance somewhat removed from previous zombies. "Piercing and scarification is an interest of mine," admits the director, "so we deal with that a little bit. The reason is that two things can keep her from indulging her hunger: one is the love of her boyfriend, and the other is the pain she inflicts on herself; otherwise, she starts going after people. Of course, the longer she's dead, the less it works."

The piercing and scarification required make-up consist-

One of the many subjects of Colonel Sinclair's painful experiments gets a final reel opportunity for revenge.



## ZOMBIE LOVE

**"The hardest thing was making the audience sympathetic to Julie, our monster and love interest," says Yuzna. "The whole movie depends on it, because it's a love story."**



The crew sets up a shot of McCord and Douglas in the military observation room, watching an experiment go horribly awry when a zombie escapes.

ing of "probably—I haven't counted—over 100 pieces," according to Steve Johnson, whose XFX company was responsible for the character's look. "There are a lot of pieces because there's so much body to cover. It's in the vein of a Cenobite, because of the self-mutilation. When I first met Brian—he has a little bit more of a dark side to him than he might want to admit—he was fascinated by this stuff. He had an amazing book called *Modern Primitive* that documents modern day people doing this kind of stuff to themselves, like African scarification rituals. It goes beyond standard piercings. A lot of our ideas came from that."

**D**ifferent facets of the makeup and mechanical effects were handled by five different makeup teams, including Steve Johnson's. "I believe in splitting the workload up, and it's not just the money," Yuzna states. "In the long run, I think it's a better idea" to have each group putting their energy into a specific task.

Kevin Brennan attended Julie's victims, three gang-bangers, who themselves become zombies. A mechanical exo-skeleton used by the army to control the creatures was built by Tim Ralston. Cadaver sequences, involving the sinister experiments perpetrated by Sarah Douglas's Lieutenant Colonel Sinclair, were the responsibility of Chris Nelson. And the Barrel Zombies, resembling the Tar Man from the first two films, fell to Wayne Toth.

"It makes it more interesting

Encased in Tim Ralston's mechanical exo-skeleton, the zombified Riverman (Basil Wallace) momentarily runs amok and attacks his terrified tormentor.



to work just on one part," opines Johnson, who was given his choice of responsibilities. "When I first started talking to Tom Rinoni, the visual effects supervisor, they asked me which part I wanted to be involved with. The two things that stood out to me were the Julie effects and the Riverman's exo-skeleton. So I had to weigh, 'Do I want to work with a middle-aged man for a couple of weeks or a beautiful girl?' I had to choose the girl."

Dividing the effects like this ensured "that all our creatures are different and unique," according to Gary Schmoeller, but practical considerations were at least as important. Kevin Brennan explains, "Production companies like to do that for different reasons: they have control over it; if they get stuck with somebody they don't like halfway through, it's easier to fire one segment. They also thought it might be more economical. In a way that makes sense, and in a way it doesn't—because once you start buying materials, you can easily do more than just one guy with a box of clay and a foam rubber kit."

If this approach had any economic benefit, it was saving time by allowing multiple units to shoot separate effects simultaneously. In fact, Sarah Douglas once found herself in the unenviable position of being handed over to a second-unit director, for scenes of experiments on zombie guinea pigs. It was the kind of situation that would not be allowed on a union picture, guild rules

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# LIVING DEAD PART III

## POST-PRODUCTION WOES

*MPAA cuts removed much of the zombies' bite.*

By Dennis Fischer

RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD III has already received notice from the censor in South Africa: the picture delivers such a concentration of "evil force" that it has been deemed unsuitable for any audience, and, consequently, banned. It is not surprising that such an over-the-top horror film would have its bouts with the MPAA ratings board; however, Brian Yuzna emphasizes that the board has its place. "I love to feel that there should be no censorship, but I also know that I would hate for there not to be a national system of ordering entertainment, so we will not be in a situation such as in Dallas, where a city commission is deciding what is acceptable and not acceptable," says Yuzna. "At least we're not in a situation where the censorship is absolute: nobody's saying you can't have it; they're just saying you can't have an R-rating."

Yuzna understands that RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD III is not an essential artistic vision that needs to be communicated to humanity; it's merely an entertainment of the goriest kind for genre fans. He convinced Trimark to prepare two versions of the film: unrated for video and foreign (which will do their own cutting) and R-rated for domestic. Due to Yuzna's utilization of replacement shots, the R-version is only ten seconds shorter than the unrated version. "I've had good success in the past with replacing shots rather than cutting time out of the movie," he explains. "Keeping everything the same length keeps the



Brian Yuzna directs the gruesome death of a guard played by Tony Hickox, director of WAXWORK. Not all of the gore survived, but Yuzna prefers some of the changes.

pace better, but it's also infinitely cheaper than going back and changing the soundtrack (which consists of multiple music, sound effects tracks and dialogue tracks). Even though we didn't really shoot cover shots, you can always go to a reaction or use the take that didn't work as well—maybe the blood didn't come out. It's those takes that they usually like for a rating."

According to Yuzna, it took 50 changes to appease the MPAA. "For the most part," he says, "whenever there was violence, once you got the point, they wanted you to cut it out. For example, if we have a corpse stabbing somebody with a scalpel, they weren't interested in seeing him stab again and again. Usually, if there was a story point, they wouldn't hassle you."

"I really don't think that a lot of the violence or gore was that tough, but I also know you have to do these things," Yuzna continues. "My feeling is that the movie unrated is fine

for [genre fans]. But if you go beyond that into a regular date-night crowd, who see even Freddy or Jason movies, it's really too much for them. Those people don't get a thrill out of watching dark, disturbing stuff. I admit I do. It's easy for me to make this kind of movie, because I just follow my instincts."

Yuzna appreciates feedback that will make the film accessible to a wider audience, but he doesn't understand the board's objection to an obviously unrealistic scene where in a person's lip is bitten and stretched like a rubber band. "Okay, it's completely unnecessary to the story, and it's mutilation, the sort of thing the MPAA doesn't like," Yuzna acknowledges. "But to me that scene is so unreal that it's fun to watch. It's the kind of effect that gets applause and cheers from straight audiences, not just genre audiences, and it bothers me to cut that out."

Despite being a specific story point, almost all of the brain

eating is out, because of its stomach-churning quality. "We had to cut out the closeups and show right before and after," says Yuzna. "It makes me realize that I've got to be more careful in the future and make sure that story point stuff like that can be covered in ways that will be accessible, so that you can leave it in."

Originally, the film contained an extended sequence of Julie (Clarke) mutilating herself by slicing her leg with a razor, sticking a wire through her fingers, and piercing her wrists with scissor. Says Yuzna, "I was worried that [the MPAA]

were not going to allow that at all, because it's self-mutilation. Yet it was a major story point, so when they started squawking—these shots were intercut with tight closeups of her eye and her lip—we cross-dissolved and overlapped them. The sequence is exactly the same length, with exactly the same shots, but they're superimpositions. Well, the MPAA bought that 100%. That told me the edge was taken off by making it artier, and to be honest with you, I like that sequence better than I did before."

Yuzna preferred the dreamlike quality of the revised sequence, and cut it into the unrated version as well, along with a less gory shot of a zombie that he ended up liking more than the blood-and-guts version. "Sometimes, when you're cutting an unrated version, you use take selections which aim at being graphic," says Yuzna, "when there might be a less graphic shot that actually works better." □



# LIVING DEAD PART III

## ZOMBIE EFFECTS

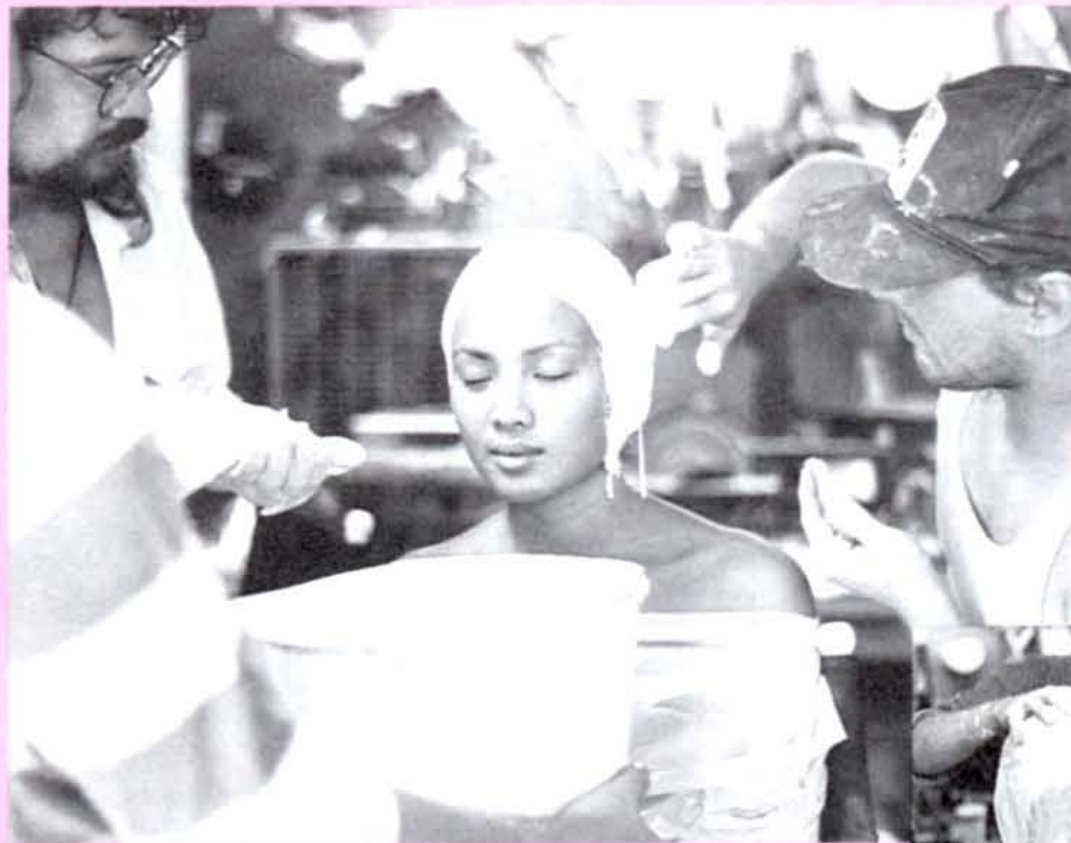
*Five separate makeup teams brought the dead to life.*

**By Steve Biodrowski  
and Dennis Fischer**

According to effects supervisor Tom Rinoni, RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD III required five separate effects teams because of short prep time. "It worked out better that they were all being developed simultaneously because we only had two and a half weeks to build everything," he says. "If one shop had built everything, they would have needed a lot more time."

Adds Yuzna, "The philosophy behind it is that certain people are better at certain things—they have different interests and passions. So we broke down the zombie effects into certain characters. I felt

Out of makeup and out of costume, Reyes strikes a nautical pose in a shot from her former modeling days.



Above: Kevin Brennan (wearing glasses) and his crew begin to encase Pia Reyes in a plaster cast (inset), the first step in transforming the lovely young actress into a decaying zombie.



posed to be a proto-type for a military weapon. The idea was that they would put him into this cage-like thing, with pivot points for every joint, and run pins through his wrist, forearms and biceps; then, if he were to get shot, it would blow away a piece of his flesh, but the metal hinges would hold him together so he could still walk and attack."

"Tim had less than two weeks to construct the thing, and the best way he knew how was steel," says Rinoni, adding with a laugh, "When you see actor Basil Wallace walking around with that thing on, grimacing in pain and barely able to stand, there's

a good reason!"

"Originally, Brian wanted to see pins going in and out of the skin, but because of time, we cheated by making the bolts look like they went completely through steel bands that held the suit in place," Ralston adds. "The bands would clamp to the skin—they had some thin padding, which I'm sure was decently uncomfortable for Basil. We would run a bolt through the exoskeleton; then with two or three turns, it would lock into a hole in the band, and another bolt would appear to come out the other side. Where the bolt screwed into the band, we simply dressed that with blood. It seemed to work—Brian was happy with the look."

Chris Nelson was chiefly responsible for the ensuing mayhem when the military revive an emaciated corpse in the opening scene. "While working with Steve on FREAKED, I no-

that if a company got certain zombies, they would really put their all into it. If they have too many different ones, where are they going to put their creative energy on a short schedule? Something's going to suffer, whereas if we break it up, each group is going to put much more creative energy into their bailiwick."

Rinoni selected the supervisors for the separate tasks. "I hired guys who are usually foremen for major shops, so they would get to key their own thing for the first time," he recounts. "A lot of time, you get bogged down in a major shop's overhead. The nice thing about hiring these individuals was that they'd be working out of a garage space. Trimark also wanted a 'name' effects guy. I had just worked with Steve Johnson on FREAKED, and he made me a great deal to do all the effects concerning Julie."

Tim Ralston was put in

charge of the Riverman zombie, who is encased by the military in an experimental exoskeleton. "Tom knew I usually do the mechanicals for creatures, and my hobby is metal sculpture," says Ralston. "I did all the mechanical stuff, and Glen Hanz, a sculptor and painter, did all of the cosmetics. We molded the actor's torso, arms and legs, and Glen made the fake limbs."

With no time for concept sketches, Ralston relied on verbal input from Rinoni and Yuzna, who wanted a crude but functional appearance, as if the device had been hastily assembled overnight. "We figured we could save some time by not going back and forth but settling on something quick," Ralston recalls. "So they just described things they wanted to see, like spikes going through bones—it was supposed to look like a very painful thing, not just braces or supports. The suit was sup-





Slightly reminiscent of William Stout's *Tar Man* design for Part I, one of Wayne Toth's barrel zombies decomposes into a mass of putrescent decay.

ticed that Chris was very good at makeup application, blending and coloring," says Rinoni. "I found this guy by the name of Clarence, whose essentially—I guess you can't call them 'bums' anymore—a street person. He's a six-foot-seven emaciated gentleman. I knew we wanted this guy to look like—he already look like a real cadaver, but we wanted jaundice and undetectable build-up around his eyes to make him even more hideously withdrawn. I have a feeling people will think that guy's a puppet until he starts walking around—he kind of looks like one of those things in *LIFE-FORCE*, except for real."

"We concentrated on realism," Nelson elaborates, "instead of the wacky, blue-faced, decaying zombies you see in most horror movies. It came out really creepy. I'm proud of that makeup, because it's so realistic."

Nelson also supplied the graphic deaths of the zombie's victims, including one played by *WAXWORK* director Antho-

ny Hickox. "He really liked his makeup, and at that time he was getting ready to reshoot *WARLOCK II* effects, so he asked me to do them," Nelson relates. "Tony's a really nice guy—he loved every second of it, and he as very patient."

During production, Nelson was asked for additional effects, including a prosthetic head for the Riverman, who is attacked by Julie before becoming a zombie himself.

"There wasn't much time, especially when they kept adding effects!" laments Nelson, who hired assistants Earl Ellis and Charles Rivera to handle the workload. At least Nelson had the compensation of a free hand in designing his work. "We definitely had the say in how our zombies looked. They figured they could get different looks if they let the five teams do their own thing, because we all have our own style."

Kevin Brennan was introduced to Rinoni by Steve Johnson, who had supervised his work on *NIGHT OF THE DEMONS*. Rinoni assigned Brennan to the gang zombies and the gore they inflict, including a crowbar through the head of an unfortunate store owner. Brennan supplied prosthetic makeup for the actors, plus radio-controlled heads for the store owner and a gang member, although the latter were limited to simple eye and jaw movement. "Nothing was too elaborate on this show, because of the amount of time and money," states Brennan. "It was basically just getting the stuff out and having it look halfway decent. Luckily, zombies are hard to mess up. If some of the foam appliance pieces aren't the best in the world, you can get away with it. It's not like an old age makeup, which needs great edges."

Without the benefit of a William Stout, whose designs inspired William Munns and Kenny Myers on *RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD*, Brennan faced the challenge of providing a unique look for his zombies. "Brian wanted something different, which is fine by me,"

The film's three gangbangers are turned into zombies by Kevin Brennan's makeup artistry. Left to right: Fabio Urena, Pia Reyes and Sal Lopez.



In an early scene, Nelson's zombie sets the film's tone by biting off the fingers of an unfortunate guard.

says the makeup artist. "It's just tough to come up with another look for a dead guy. Luckily, the gang zombies get burned by steam, so we could put blisters and twisted skin on them. We also had to alter some of our appliances on-set, chopping them up. Brian had some ideas, almost like adding a couple of stages, because they all go through different transitions from freshly dead to rigor mortis. It was tough, but again, because they're zombies, we could get away with it."

Rinoni was familiar with Wayne Toth through his work at K.N.B. Effects Shop, which supplied skeletons for *ARMY OF DARKNESS*. This seemed like the perfect background for crating the Barrel Zombies, walking skeletons better achieved through mechanics than makeup. "Brian said he wanted some weird sort of fused look for the Barrel Corpse Number One," recalled the effects supervisor. "I had this idea where his head is fused to his shoulder and his arm fused to his chest. When he goes to bite human flesh, he separates, leaving a half-skull half-face and a dangling skeletal arm. Wayne had all that stuff down from *ARMY*, all the puppeteering techniques to do a live-action skeleton. He did a fabulous job." □



# LIVING DEAD PART III

## ZOMBIE MAKEUP

*XFX turned Mindy Clarke into a zombie cenobite.*

By Steve Biodrowski

Julie, the self-scarred zombie, is the one undead who must be absolutely convincing to the audience. Realizing this goal fell to Steve Johnson's XFX, Inc. "Brian wanted me to be in charge not just of her makeup but of her character, period," explains Johnson. "So I had a hand in everything. I tried to avoid large appliances, because I think what makes a girl beautiful is always a very small thing, a tiny element that sets her apart from the crowd. Anytime you start messing with that—if anything goes wrong at all, suddenly she's not beautiful. That accounts for

Johnson's makeup had to walk the fine line of making Clarke's zombie look both attractive and frightening.



the fact that we have so many appliances. I didn't want to cover much of her face, so anytime we have something stuck into her, it's a small, individual appliance around the wound. That was the main concern: even when in her full regalia—completely pierced, scarred and mutilated—she had to remain beautiful. Even though she is discolored and zombie-like, we tried to stay with 'pretty' zombie colors, blues and purples."

As an example of the many appliances, Johnson points out that Julie's nipple rings, attached to chains leading to other parts of her body, required prosthetic breasts. "Which is good," he jokes, "because I wouldn't want to be around exposed breasts—I don't know about the other guys!"

Certainly, actress Mindy Clarke felt comfortable despite the semblance of being exposed. "As real as these might look, they're fake—that makes it okay to me. If for some reason they wanted me to appear without (the prosthetics), I would be very uncomfortable, because I'm not the type to go 'Woow!'" she laughs, flashing Johnson's handiwork. "It's funny the way other people react: some take a while to get used to it; others ignore it. We went to a drive-through, and the guy there just gave it a look and completely ignored it, which was strange. Was he being polite? Now he's probably calling all the mental hospitals to find out who escaped!"



On the set of RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD III, Steve Johnson touches up makeup on Mindy Clarke as the film's guilt-ridden teenage zombie.

In the early stages of Julie's appearance, the on-set application was handled by Bill Corso and David Dupuis; the full-body makeup for the later stages required the additional assistance of Leon Laderach. Julie "initially starts hurting herself by doing things that aren't permanently scarring. Then all of a sudden she goes for it—and does it in 20 minutes, when it takes us six hours! I can't figure it out!" laments Johnson. "We didn't have the luxury of a makeup test, except on a full-body mannequin of her. The first day we did it, just to figure out how to hook it up took us nine hours, which is a little ridiculous. Later, we got it down to six."

The process was aided and abetted by Clarke's positive attitude. "She made it fun—something that always helps, because it has the potential to be a miserable experience for everyone involved," says Johnson. "You wake up every morning at 3:00 a.m. to do the same things over and over—it gets old after the first day. But she was great—I'd work with her again in a second. She actually appreciates the craft behind it and admits that it helps her performance by helping her get into the character."

Clarke is quick to return the praise. "The first few days were fun, because of the makeup guys!" she exclaims. "But after 19-hour days and coming right back in the morning, I was absolutely exhausted, and I just wanted to sleep!" The actress

remains upbeat about the experience. "It's possible I'll never do something like this again, or have the opportunity, but this is wonderful. People look at this makeup and say, 'It's so gory!' but I don't have bad dreams about it—just dreams of trying to take it off, because it's such a long process."

Despite the rough hours and rushed schedule, Johnson remains positive of his director's ability to deliver the goods. "I liked working with Brian," he says. "I've enjoyed his work in the past, and I can appreciate someone used to working with low budgets. You'd better be able to do something interesting with \$50 million, but Brian's been able to do something with less. God knows there were problems with time and budget, but the script was there."

Part of Johnson's happiness with the project stems from the fact that, as on FREAKED, he was handling a lead character with plenty of dialogue. "However, we didn't have giant devices strapped inside Mindy's mouth," he says, referring to the torture inflicted on Alex Winter in the previous movie. "The real challenge here was to make her not look like a Cenobite—that was the only reservation in my mind. I just enjoy working on a character that's going to be seen a lot. So many times, effects are left on the cutting room floor or thrown out by the MPAA, or they end up not being filmed properly. So it's nice to work on a lead character." □



## ZOMBIE GLUT

**"I felt very daunted about making another zombie movie," says Yuzna. "My God, aren't there enough? My approach to be different was to make the main character a zombie."**



Ralston's exo-skeleton for the Riverman, suggesting a jury-rigged device which would turn the living dead into weapons controlled by the military.

stipulating that the first-unit director must be present for all scenes of principal actors. Adding insult to injury, while first-unit was moving to a new set-up, Yuzna stepped over to inspect the second-unit's progress—not to confer with his star but to complain that the camera was not properly capturing the effect of a drill penetrating an arm. Douglas remained philosophical about such less-than-ideal conditions, which are perhaps inevitable on a low-budget set. "The English and Europeans are used to working in difficult situations, not getting much money, and not getting our food on time," she says, then goes on to explain her involvement with the difficult production: "It's the usual thing: there's a lot of tension, and I'm hired as the light relief," she jokes. "People are surprised, because they expect villains to have villainous sides to them—which of course we do—but we also have wonderful comedic talents. I enjoy being on the set and having a good time, and there's a lot of little jokes flying; otherwise, we'd all go crazy."

Douglas was very impressed with the quality of the effects, although their gory nature did cause her some concern. "Many years ago, I did a film called *PEOPLE THAT TIME FORGOT*," she recalls. "In those days, the monsters would be funny cardboard things, and there would be a man with green paint slopping around the nostrils. This is very advanced; the special effects are excellent." Regarding the

gore she adds, "This is so far beyond anything real that I don't feel badly about doing it. There's certain things that I wouldn't want to do—I'm talking about violence in movies—but if the role is right and the director is right, who knows? I also know there isn't enough work around, so you have to see how the wind is blowing when you make these decisions."

If she was a bit put off by the film's mayhem, then what drew her to the part? "The

very, very original I loved, so it had that in its favor," she says, adding that she wanted to attempt a more American characterization. "I'm not doing an American accent, but I've lost my Englishness," she states. "I would like to say I'm doing this because I want to do a really good American accent; the truth is I don't. If I was doing a major motion picture with a dialect coach, then with the amount of work you do per day I'm sure I could get it. But as an exercise, I am perfecting what a lot of people call 'Americaneese'; in the old days, it was called 'mid-Atlantic.' Certainly when I go back to Stratford-on-Avon, my family think I sound American."

**D**espite the limited budget, the film's familiar title and (admittedly tenuous) connection to Romero's cult classic helped secure cast members, even if in some cases they had not actually seen the films. Kent McCord claims to have signed on because he liked the script and his character, not because he was a fan of the

series. "To tell you the truth, I've never seen 1 or 2, or even the original—only bits and pieces on retrospectives," he admits. "When my daughter found out, she was very excited—she told me they have a big following. I went down to one of the video stores, but it was checked out. I thought, 'Good, then I'll just stay away from it, because I don't want it influencing what we're doing here.' I'll look at it afterward."

J. Trevor Edmond, on the other hand, credits the series with spurring him into his profession. "I saw *RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD* while working in a movie theatre and became a real fan—I suppose that had something to do with my wanting to be an actor," he recounts. "When I heard they were filming Part 2, I tried to get into it, but that didn't happen. I'm not as fascinated with [horror movies] anymore, but I know a lot about them, and it's ironic that this would be my first lead."

"I saw the first *LIVING DEAD*, the George Romero film, but I didn't really associate it with this one," says Pia Reyes, who plays one of the gang members. "I loved the script because it wasn't your typical cut-up chainsaw movie. It had a love theme to it, and

Clarke and J. Trevor Edmond as Julie and Curt before a motorcycle accident puts their love to the supreme test.



The crew films a preliminary scene of Nelson's zombie under restraint.





# LIVING DEAD PART III

## COOL GHOUL GIRL

*Mindy Clarke on the  
art of zombie acting.*

**By Steve Biodrowski**

"I personally have never been into horror films," states Mindy Clarke from beneath makeup that, ironically, alters her appearance into that of a scarified zombie. "My opinion is that I prefer the more serious films that scare me, like *THE EXORCIST*. I actually like special effects, but I've never been scared of them—I loved *FRI-DAY THE 13TH—3D*, when Jason smashes that guy's head and his eye pops out, because I loved the effect."

The young actress initially had reservations about playing her first lead in a horror film,

Julie before her transformation. At one point, a punk look was considered, to foreshadow her latest appearance.



but the character offered some dramatic potential. "When I first heard about this, I wasn't sure I wanted to do it, but when I read the script, I was really surprised—I liked the challenge. Julie's a rebellious teen-ager from a dysfunctional family, and the only thing she has is Curt, so they're really playing out that strange *ROMEO AND JULIET*/SID AND NANCY-type relationship. She turns into a zombie, but she's not just a bad ghoul walking around moaning. Her spirit's intact, and at times she struggles with the fact that she's in danger of attacking her boyfriend. She doesn't know how to handle it, so she goes through stages of extreme mental torture. It's wonderful to play, because there's a lot involved doing a scene that is entirely Julie struggling through this situation. She finds that inflicting pain brings her back to reality; then she gets to the point where even that doesn't curb the horrible hunger for brains, so she breaks down and eats someone." Laughs Clarke, "I talk so seriously about eating brains, because that's how we talk about it on the set; then I realize it sounds absolutely hysterical!"

Clark's stage performance in a production based on the ill-fated Sid Vicious and Nancy Blugeon provided her with some background for this kind of characterization. "Mindy played that role real well, that near-death experience," says co-star Edmund. "Nancy was about as close to death as you



Clarke's zombie—pierced, scarred and mutilated—lurks in the sewers, where eventually she will succumb to her hunger for human brains.

can get while still being alive. You're just walking the other side of the line with Julie."

While acknowledging the similarity, Clarke makes a distinction: whereas Nancy had simply lost touch with reality, Julie is facing an unreal situation. "Nancy was literally psychotic—she went from one extreme to the other, as mentally ill people do," the actress explains. "The producers wanted someone who reacted that way, but Julie has something happen to her that is inconceivable, reality-wise. To make that believable as an actress, you use that parallel, the pain

addicts feel."

Having survived her ordeal in the makeup chair, Clarke is willing to consider future horror projects, if the material is right. "Even though I'm still a young actress, working hard to get jobs like everyone else, hopefully I won't take everything that comes along," she predicts. As far as the impact of her first character on the public consciousness, Clarke jokes, "I'm going to be a cult! This whole thing she does to herself is creative, so I'll be a nice influence for the young girls: 'Please don't do this at home—it's not safe!'" □

After a neck-breaking motorcycle accident, Curt carries the inert Julie to his father's military installation, to revive her with the Trioxin gas.





I'm a romantic. I think everyone should do a horror film, because they're really fun."

Acting in a horror film may be fun, but one of Yuzna's goals was to eliminate the increasingly comic tone established by the performances in the first two films. RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD was a mixture of nihilistic horror and black comedy played mostly straight by actors who, except for Don Calpha and James Karen, were not in on the joke; Part 2 unwisely seized on and expanded the humorous approach to the entire cast, reducing itself to a tongue-in-cheek spoof. Such is not the case this time, according to Yuzna. "We are a horror film through and through," he attests. "We certainly want to be entertaining, but our story is told in a suspenseful, scary way. I was very happy when Trimark said they didn't want a jokefest. I got the feeling in the '80s that things got out of hand with the humor, and I don't want to see movies like that now. I'm sick of the jokes, so I thought it would be nice to get back to doing a horror movie with that kind of pulp element—stupid and fun but played straight. BRIDE OF THE RE-ANIMATOR played some stuff straight, but it had a lot of tongue-in-cheek stuff, which we're not doing here."

To achieve this pulp tone, Yuzna would reign in his cast when he felt they were going a little too far. Gone are the amusingly hysterical theatrics of James Karen in Parts 1 and 2. "On the first one, the performances were so huge you couldn't do anything but laugh," says Edmond. "Brian pulled me aside one day and said, 'We got some dailies from last week where you were way over the top—everyone's going to laugh rather than sympathize, and that's not the movie we're going for.' So we reshot that stuff."

Reyes expresses a similar view of Yuzna's method. "We had a meeting in the beginning, and he said he wanted to make it really believable," she recounts. "I think he obtained it. In some horror films, they overdo it, and it comes

## ZOMBIE ECONOMY

**"Nothing was too elaborate, because of money," says Brennan. "But zombies are hard to mess up: if the foam appliances are not the best, you can get away with it."**



Urena in blisters and twisted skin. "It's tough to come up with another look for a dead guy," observes Brennan. "Luckily, the gang gets burned by steam."

off bogus, so I tried to underplay the emotions a little bit, like my fear—because I hate all that screaming!"

Clarke and McCord also noted the low-key approach, although they acknowledge that the very outrageousness of the subject matter may provoke laughter even when played straight. "Nothing is intended to be campy," says Clarke. "Obviously, it's such an extreme situation that it might come off that way, but it's done in a very serious manner. Because the subject matter is over the top, Brian made the effort to tone it down, so he can get across what he's trying to do. He's a real actors' director—he has specific ideas about what he wants, but at the same time he's open to my instincts."

"We're not doing Mel Brooks," McCord concurs. "We're playing this for real. As you know, you don't always get that result. It may unintentionally be funny, but I don't think so. I trust Brian's judgment. I said, 'I'm going to go as far as I can with this thing.' Brian watched and said, 'Now

bring it back.' That means you can try some things, and the director will bring you back to what he wants—you don't have to play it cautious."

Penny likewise refuses to state that Part 3 will definitely contain less comedy. "The jury's still out on that, because I think the successful way to make comedy is to play it straight on the set," he claims. "For my money, this thing would be great if it turns out very scary and brings a tear to the eye. The comic emphasis is much less—we did try to get Jimmy Karen and Don Calpha, but they had a schedule conflict. Thinking back on it, it might be better this way, because seeing them again may have thrown the whole tone in a direction we didn't want." Nevertheless, the film couldn't avoid at least a couple amusing cameos, including one by Brian Peck, who appeared in both 1 and 2. Explains Penny, "When I got the job, Brian was the first person I called, to say, 'You have to be in this one!' He's in the opening scene, along with Tony Hickox [director of WAX-

WORKS]."

Part of the reason for adopting a more serious approach may be last year's big-budget DEATH BECOMES HER, which co-opted RETURN's zombie humor, including a sequence wherein Meryl Streep "survives" a broken neck only to be informed by a doctor that she's dead. "When I was watching the movie, I turned to my wife and said, 'Dan O'Bannon wrote this scene, with precisely the same gag, in 1984!'" says Penny. "We had a lot more in the script about dealing with Julie's broken neck that was great. When DEATH BECOMES HER came out, we had to backpeddle a bit."

Change of tone and lack of continuity notwithstanding, Penny hopes that he has successfully continued the legacy of the series. "I was a big fan of the first; I didn't care much for the second," he says. "The way I looked at it was I felt there was a responsibility, because the living dead have become a modern mythology."

Yuzna is somewhat less reverent in his attitude toward making a third film, insisting that he was worried about neither living up to Part 1 nor living down Part 2. "This movie is so different that it doesn't need to be a sequel; because of that, I don't give a shit!" he laughs. Although expecting RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD 3 to stand on its own, Yuzna is happy to acknowledge that its familiar title will help procure a bigger release than most low-budget efforts receive in today's marketplace. "It's a corporate strategy that you can depend on these titles to generate a certain number of sales," he says, referring to Trimark's sequel policy. "Even though this is very low-budget, we tried to plan it in such a way that we weren't fighting the budget all the way; we tried to use our experience to get more on the screen than you're justified in getting for this type of schedule." □

Additional quotes from producer/director Brian Yuzna by Dennis S. Fischer.



# TICKS

## Brian Yuzna bugged Tony Randel for more blood.

By Alan Jones and  
David Ian Salter

Distributors worldwide have been reaching for their checkbooks since *TICKS* unspooled at the American Film Market in February, and the rapturous reception the creature feature received there is currently being echoed around the European festival circuit. With one foot firmly planted in '50s big-bug nostalgia and the other in '90s nausea, *TICKS* finds "the vampire of the insect world" mutated

At the climax, a gigantic tick bursts forth from the body of Panic, played by Alphonse Ruberio.

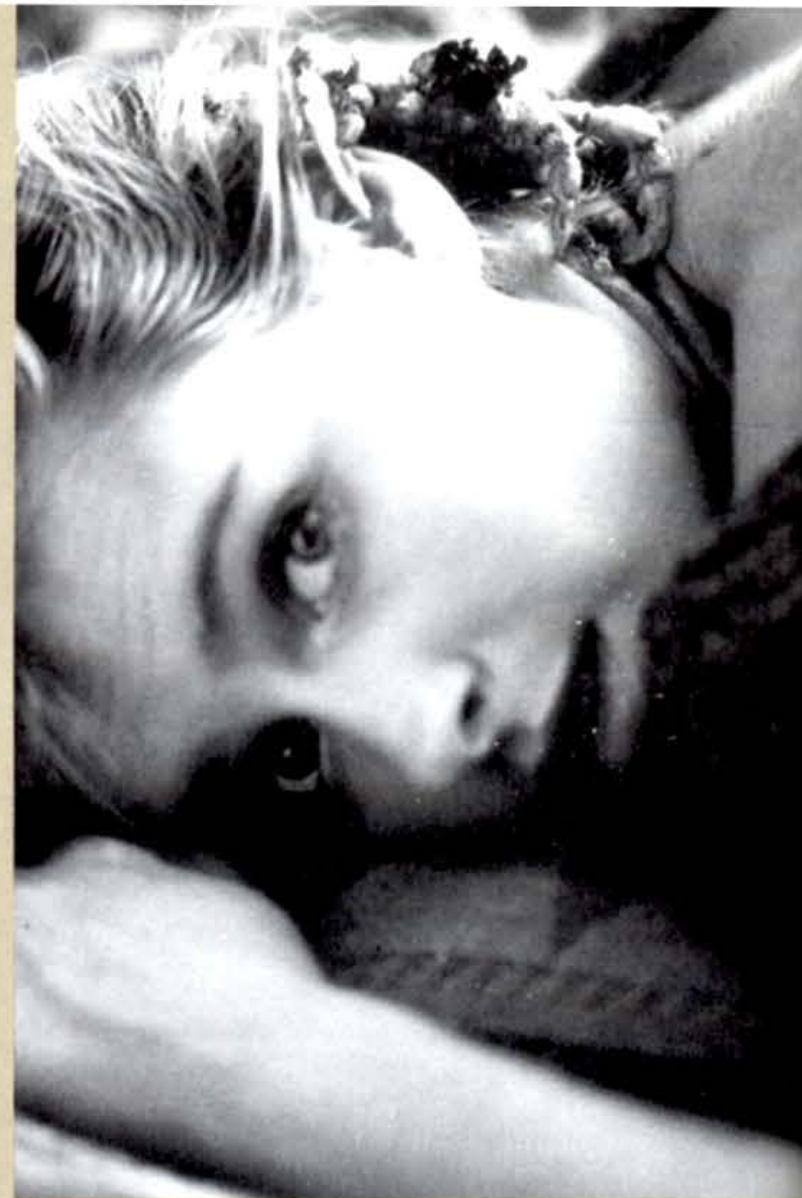


by a steroid-based fertilizer used by marijuana farmers to accelerate the growth of their illegal crops. The abominable arachnids then go on a rampage, attacking inner city teenage campers on a consciousness-raising trip in the North California wilds. Starring Peter Scolari, Rosalind Allen, and Ami Dolenz, in a script by Brent V. Friedman, the enjoyable combination of low-budget ingenuity, grungy gore, and gleeful grossness is the happy result of a slightly less-than-happy collaboration between two hired guns accustomed to developing their own projects: director Tony Randel (*HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II*) and executive producer Brian Yuzna (*RE-ANIMATOR*).

"Generally, on every movie I had anything to do with, except for *TICKS*, I was involved with originating the concept, which to me is the real fun, being there for the original scheming," says Yuzna. "With *TICKS*, (producer) Jack Murphy already had the project, and I helped."

The original script was conceived 20 years ago by renowned stop-motion master Doug Beswick, after being bitten by a tick and realizing he had found an appropriate subject for his craft. *CYCLE OF BLOOD*, written in the early '70s by Beswick and a friend, was about a pair of young couples, out for a weekend in the woods, who are menaced by mutant ticks. After unsuccessfully shopping the script around Hollywood for years, Beswick was finally able, while creating monster suits for *SYNGENOR* (1991), to induce the film's producer, Jack Murphy, to take an option on the project.

Murphy liked Beswick's premise but hired *SYNGENOR* screen-writer Friedman for a complete rewrite, lowering the characters' ages in an appeal to the project's anticipated youthful audience. "I never read the original script, but it was considerably different from what we



Ami Dolenz as "rich bitch" debutante Dee Dee succumbs to advances by a bloodthirsty tick.

filmed," says Randel. "The whole troubled teenage element was all Brent's idea. He likes to write about that sort of stuff."

Randel was brought on as a director-for-hire by Murphy, who then sold the project to the Overseas Film Group. Robby Little, the company's chairman, hired Yuzna as executive producer, thinking that his background in the genre would help attract financing. Preferring not to be drawn out on the subject, all Randel will say is, "It wasn't a collaboration that worked at all."

The problem stemmed from the different approach advocated by the two genre veterans, with Randel and Yuzna at odds about whether to emphasize the characters or the effects. "We redid the script, basically very light rewrites, nothing structural," says Yuzna. "What I tried to do was bring more visual interaction between the ticks and the people, stronger types of stuff like a person having a tick coming in under his skin and having to shoot himself. The original idea was a little cleaner than that."

Randel, on the other hand, was aiming for a "lot of scary fun." He explains, "I didn't want loads of people to die in this movie. It didn't seem appropriate to start killing these characters off one by one like idiots in a body count film. I figured it would be more satisfying to craft a situation where the characters and their actions were very reality-based. Not only would it have been unreal for them to die, it would also take up too much time setting up their deaths. I felt that formula would take away from the pure fright stuff."

Initially, Randel got his way, at least during the 24 days of principal photogra-





Doug Beswick positions a mechanical tick on Dolenz. The effects expert originally conceived the project as a showcase for stop motion, but other techniques were used for interaction between humans and arachnids.

phy, shot on location during the summer of 1992. "I let the kids improvise their lines during the shoot," Randel recalls. "I may think I'm a teenager, but I'm unfortunately 20 years past that now! I couldn't tell any of them how to authentically talk and act, so I told them what I wanted them to do in a scene, what I needed to achieve, and let them approach it in their individual ways. I was pleased that the end result was very natural and effective performances."

However, the \$1.5 million budget had some trouble accommodating both locations and effects. "We spend the money on effects in this kind of movie," explains Yuzna. "We do the minimum of what it takes to shoot for 24 days and then put all our money in effects. On this film, we had to do that plus go somewhere. One of the biggest problems was where to shoot, because it really needed to take place in the woods. We usually never leave town, because it costs too much to put people up, but from a production point of view, we decided we really needed to go to Big Bear, to be in lush woods that didn't have this L.A. look. As we were going through the shoot, I could tell once again the big problem was the effects, but Mike Muscal, who was effects coordinator on *HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS*, came in with John Fante, our d.p. and they did a tremendous amount of insert shooting to make those

ticks look real."

Inserts notwithstanding, the results were deemed weak by all concerned. "TICKS was such a difficult project as it went badly for so long," says Randel. "I believed in the movie, in what the actors and crew were doing, and in what I shot. I felt it worked...sort of. There was an incomplete feel to it, and what it clearly lacked was punch. Little could have very easily said, 'Look, this movie doesn't work. Do whatever you have to do but just finish it. That way we'll get out fast and cover our losses.' But he believed in the project, too. More importantly, he started believing in me. He could have easily had me fired. Yet he didn't. He kept me on and gave me extra money to shoot for another week, which represented one-fourth of our original schedule."

One of Beswick's stop-motion puppet ticks. The mechanical versions were effective for long shots, but close-ups required more realistic movement.



**"I tried to add more interaction, stronger stuff like a person with a tick under his skin having to shoot himself."**

*—Producer Brian Yuzna—*

Yuzna's assessment of the film at that point is that "Tony did a terrific job of getting performances out of the kids and making them seem real and fun—you like them and it's always moving. I think Robby Little is to be commended for not giving up on it when it looked bleak, because it really came to a point where he could have said, 'We spent our budget. Let's pack it up and move on,' and instead he said, 'How can we make this better?' We came up with suggestions about extending these marijuana farmers and having some killings up front, which I had always felt was a necessity for this type of movie. You can't wait to introduce the monster these days—it's not like the '50s where you could have a stinger and then wait for two-thirds of the movie."

"We decided we needed more effects and more gore," admits Randel. The additional scenes were shot with a new crew, including cinematographer Jacques Haitkin, four months after principal had wrapped. A subplot was added, featuring Clint Howard as a marijuana farmer attacked by ticks in the film's opening minutes.

"It really made a huge difference—it's the equivalent of the opening of *NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*, with Freddy at the very beginning," claims Yuzna. "It gives you a tone to know what's coming. Now you have this extended opening sequence of the big tick eggs and POVs of

ticks running across the floor at this guy. When you go back to the kids, you're ready to get into some character stuff, and you're cutting back to this character having trouble, so you never have to wait for the pace of the movie to start. Once Leslie [Rosenthal, editor] had that extra footage—the movie was running a little short, also—she was able to intercut it with the best of the original so she had a pacing that was very good. It really shows that, if you hang in there, these things can really work out well."

The re-shooting expand-



**“I figured it would be more satisfying to craft a situation where the characters and their actions were reality-based.”**

**—Director Tony Randel—**

ed the effects, but the body count remains small, according to the director's preference. "You see one teen die and the bad guys," says Randel. "So far, no one's complained about there not being enough death. That's mainly because the gore is really cranked up!"

TICKS certainly delivers on that blood-splattered front, thanks to the title characters supplied by Doug Beswick. In one particularly gruesome set piece, a blood-sucker burrows beneath the skin of a character nicknamed Panic (Alfonso Ribeiro) and bursts forth as a ravenous, marauding monster. Randel points out, "Despite its being Doug's brainchild, he didn't interfere on the directing front. He was happy it was being made and ecstatic it turned out better than he anticipated. He did a marvelous job on the amount of money we had. TICKS delivers maximum thrills thanks to his talent and input. The tick impaled on the hypodermic needle in the veterinarian surgery is one of my favorites. And the stop-motion tick makes the ending really fly."

Despite Beswick's affection for stop-motion, not all of the ticks seen in the film are animated. Beswick and his crew designed and constructed over 100 mechanical ticks for shots in which they had to interact with live actors. These models were highly specialized creations, each designed to do one particular task: walking, jumping, wriggling and squishing. In addition to the basic latex prop ticks required to do little more than pose on actors and look menacing, there were soft ticks full of fake blood, designed to pop when squeezed, and background ticks with springs in their legs, rigged to "walk" when dragged across the floor on a string, not to mention the more sophisticated articulated ticks with legs and pincers controlled by cables.

"There's a lot of wide shots of our pull-ticks scurrying across the floor," observes Beswick. "But we wanted to get stop-motion shots where the tick goes into a shadow, looks around, mandibles work-



Tom Hanks' former BOSOM BUDDIES co-star Peter Scolari (left) and Seth Green (right) watch in horror while veterinarian Judy Jean Berns discovers an enlarged tick during an autopsy on an unfortunate canine victim.

ing, then scampers away. Our pull-ticks will work from about five-feet-plus away; Any closer than that, you want to go stop-motion."

Randel, no stranger to the field of special effects, having begun his career in the effects department, on Roger Corman's BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS, shares Beswick's enthusiasm for the technique. "The audience really likes to see things animated," says the director. "They know what it is, but it doesn't matter. We have a lot of shots of the ticks doing things where it's obviously not stop-motion. And when we put these stop-motion shots in there, it adds a little bit of a delightful quality that is very effective."

Because Beswick prefers a low-tech, hands-on approach to his work, he generally eschews Go-Motion computer-controlled cameras, which eliminate the strobing effect that results from the too-clear frames of traditional stop-motion. Ironically, that strobing is precisely what Beswick was trying to achieve with his stop-motion ticks. "An insect usually does look a little strobey, a little quick-action, so I figured it was the perfect subject for

stop-motion," says the animator, who doesn't seem bothered by the project's deviation from his original conception. His original reason for trying to get the story produced was to provide himself with an opportunity to apply his skills to the task of bringing giant ticks to life, an opportunity that the project in its present form amply provides.

Despite this giant insect premise, Randel feels that comparisons to such '50s staples as TARANTULA and THEM are wide of the mark. "TICKS isn't really an homage," he explains, "as I always visualized it in contemporary terms. Nor does it have those ponderous scientific explanations as to why something is happening. I don't think it owes much to the '50s monster cycle. It does owe a lot to the 'kids going out into the wilds and being relentlessly attacked' genre—with a bit of the 'nature gone awry' thrown in! But I'm not saying anything profound about ecological issues, toxic chemicals, or drug abuse. These days, it's idiotic to go and make a movie that puts in neon headlines 'It's Bad to Mess With Nature' or 'Just Say No.' Everyone's done that. There's no strong statements, no blinding with science. I dispense with it all very early so that we can just get on the roller-coaster ride and have lots of scary fun."

Randel adds, "I think TICKS works because it doesn't try to be too much. What it does is work on the purely visceral level. I don't have a thing about insects. But people tell me TICKS gives them the creeps like ARACHNOPHOBIA. I wonder if they would have felt the same way seeing these rubber things on strings simply being pulled over the set!" □

Director Tony Randel clashed with Brian Yuzna on the subject of the film's tone. "I didn't want loads of people to die in this movie," he says.





# H . P . LOVECRAFT'S NECRONOMICON

## An ersatz adaption of Abdhul Alhazred.

By Steve Biodrowski

Brian Yuzna's next genre project is *NECRONOMICON*, a three-part anthology loosely inspired by the work of H.P. Lovecraft. Besides producing the film, Yuzna directed one of the segments and the wrap-around, featuring Jeffrey Combs as the Rhode Island author reading stories from the eponymous volume.

"It originally was something I was trying to scheme up to take advantage of the people that I have business relationships with in Japan," explains Yuzna. "What we tried to do was come up with an idea for using the three important cultural blocks of the world: Europe, Asia and America. I've always been a fan of trilogies and compilations. It's not easy to get one made, because they're not considered commercial, but I was able to use business and artistic connections with Japan and Europe to get financing. I thought it would be interesting to have three stories, each directed by someone from each part of the world.

"As we were trying to come up with stories, I thought, 'We need a hook. There's lots of old Lovecraft stories that would be great, but you could never make a feature out of them, so maybe the thing to do is adapt those. We'll call it *NECROMICON*, and that will give it an umbrella.' Truly, I think *THE NECROMICON* is a better title, without the 'H.P. Lovecraft's...' which has been done too many times, with *THE UNNAMABLE* and so on. *REANIMATOR* was the first that really sold itself as Lovecraft, but now it's gotten to the point where it's



Top: Jeffrey Combs, as Lovecraft, displays "the unmentionable Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdhul Alhazred," which featured prominently in many of the author's stories. Right: Yuzna directs the anthology's third and final episode, "Whispers."

out of hand."

Yuzna and his collaborators originally attempted faithful adaptations of specific tales. "That didn't last long, because we found that, as in all the other adaptations, so much had to be added, just like with Poe, because there's only a kernel of fright and suspense there," says Yuzna. "We actually ended up dropping any real reference to any particular Lovecraft

story and writing new ones in the tradition of Lovecraft. Of course, there have been a ton of stories written that way, by people like Robert Bloch. Lovecraft created such a big world that, once you understand what he does, you realize that there are numberless possibilities to create stories, and that's what we did.

"You'll recognize in the episode I did, 'Whispers,' an el-

ement from 'The Whisperer in Darkness,' which was the whispering," Yuzna continues. "It has none of his characters, locations, or situations, but it still exists in a world of existential fear. The feeling I was trying to get—and this is very Lovecraftian—is that all our culture, all our religion, all our philosophies—heaven-hell, good-bad—all those things we have created are nothing more than a shadowplay that we make up to entertain ourselves within a cruel, uninterested, and impersonal universe."

This sort of conceptualization is usually missing from adaptations like *THE RESURRECTED*, which make the mistake of borrowing Lovecraft's plot while ignoring his mythology. Yuzna, however, is non-



committal when asked if this will be the element that make H.P. LOVECRAFT'S *NECROMICON* worthy of its name. "It could be," he replies. "I mean, I'm sure that, of this one, once again it will be said, 'It's not like Lovecraft!' To me, it doesn't really matter that much whether it's 'true' or not. A lot of times you can do very 'true' adaptations and miss the whole damn point." □



# House of Horrors

**Curator Cortlandt Hull on his "Museum of Classic Horrors."**

*By Bram Eisenthal*

At midnight, on October 30, 1966, Cortlandt Hull, distant relative of the Henry Hull who starred in *WEREWOLF OF LONDON* (1935), found himself in the company of several hell-spawned house guests in the form of Hollywood's most nightmarish creations. Though it sounds like a terrible dream, Hull had actually just unveiled the Witch's Dungeon, a museum of life-sized horrors. For the ensuing 26 years, the artist, illustrator, and curator has devoted himself to the small Swiss-chalet gingerbread house next to his home in Bristol, Connecticut. There, during an exclusive two-weekend engagement every Halloween season, 800-900 brave souls, in groups of four, take an unforgettable ten-minute tour that brings them uncomfortably close to 13 of filmdom's most infamous monsters. Lurking around corners are Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster, and the Wolfman, along with other creatures of the night, each in a diorama from the original movie, complete with an excerpt from the soundtrack.

A true film buff, Hull has made the acquaintance of many genre figures who have lent support. Vincent Price, Mark Hamill, and June Foray (the voice of *ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE*'s Natasha Fatale) have all recorded exclusive voice-tracks to enhance the Dungeon's spooky atmosphere. "Happy Halloween to all

you brave souls," intones Hamill to those in line. Once inside, visitors are greeted by the velvet voice of Vincent Price, who welcomes "poor mortals to this Witch's Dungeon of Nightmares." Foray provides the voice of the Dungeon's mascot, Zenobia the Gypsy Witch. This lovable hag offers a delectable concoction of mummy powder, shrunken hearts, and lizard gizzards. "Drink every drop," she cackles, "and the blossom of youth is yours forever, with the sleep of centuries to come—the black sleep of death, that is!"

Hull is fully aware of how the trio's contributions have helped draw fans. "They're all very dear friends, who have been extremely generous with their talents and input," says the appreciative artist. In fact, just last year, Price and Hamill joined Hull in a battle against



A carved replica of the Dracula crest backs Hull's figure of the character.



Lon Chaney, Jr.'s Wolfman, one of many





Universal monsters in the Dungeon.

MCA/Universal. The film studio didn't approve of Hull's use of their copyrighted creatures, and their lawyer sent a typical "cease and desist" letter to the artist.

But Hull is far from an entrepreneur. "I'm not a businessman," he admits. "I'm an artist, and I do this to share my love of film with other fans, certainly not to make money." Proof of his non-profit claim is the fifty-cent admission price, which only partially pays for materials and repairs. "There are usually things inside that have to be fixed, and I'm also constantly working on my displays to improve them. That costs a lot of money, which comes out of my pocket."

Hull spent two months fighting for the survival of his museum. His industry friends came through in grand style by writing letters and mounting media campaigns to win public support for the Dungeon. Price

minced no words, referring to Universal as "cheap and disgraceful" in an Associated Press story.

With all the negative publicity, the studio capitulated and gave Hull written permission to use likenesses of their creations. He promptly put up a plaque thanking MCA/Universal for its endorsement. The Witch's Dungeon is now the only seasonal exhibit authorized by Universal, and Hull is naturally "most grateful" for the favor.

For Hull, the love affair with things macabre dates back to boyhood, when he spent many hours sequestered with the scariest Hollywood had to offer, astounded by the make-up and special effects. Later, he befriended Oscar-winning make-up artists Dick Smith (*THE EXORCIST*), John Chambers (*PLANET OF THE APES*), and Don Post, Sr. (the original *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*), all of whom Hull credits with assistance and advice that helped make the museum what it is today. "Few people realize you cannot create an exhibit like the Dungeon without a solid background in various artistic mediums," says Hull. "Painting, sculpting, and set and prop design are all necessary if you want it to be professionally done, and I'm always learning new techniques."

Hull earned his B.F.A. and M.A. Ed. from the University of Hartford but admits "no college can give you the knowledge that these great artists have given me." Hull has taken that knowledge and put it to use as a freelance artist, restoring carousels and supplying make-



The Phantom of the Opera, adapted from a life-cast of Lon Chaney, Sr.

up and special props for television shows, commercials and murder-mystery weekends.

Hull's friends have contributed more than knowledge and voices; they have also contributed costumes and props that add a touch of authenticity to the museum. The outfits sported by Professor Jarrod and Dr. Phibes, for instance, were donated by Price, who wore them in *HOUSE OF*

WAX and *THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES*. One of four existing rings worn by Bela Lugosi as Dracula was given to Hull—obviously by a very good friend, as the ring is made of solid white gold. "The original is far too rare to risk exhibiting in the museum," he says. Visitors, however, still get a privileged view of horror trivia not granted to most mortals: the carved crest seen behind the figure of Dracula "is a detailed replica of that on the ring, and I may eventually make a copy of it to put on him."

Also, the Creature and Mole People figures are made from original molds; Dracula, Jarrod, the Wolfman, Phantom, and Frankenstein Monster are all adapted from life-casts of the actors. Phibes and the Red Death (the Phantom's disguise during the film's masquerade ball), as well as Zenobia, are completely sculpted by Hull, whose knack for collecting film memorabilia makes him a true

continued on page 61

Curator Cortlandt Hull poses with other denizens of the Witch's Dungeon.







Barbara Steele cuts a striking figure in **CURSE OF THE CRIMSON ALTAR**. "I just flew in and did that to pay the rent!" she laughs.



# BARBARA STEELE

## QUEEN OF HORROR

**Part One of our exhaustive profile examines her early career in Italy.**

*By Steve Biodrowski  
Interview by Christopher S.  
Dietrich with Peter Beckman*

There is something odd, not to say uncanny, about bestowing what is meant as an horrific epithet upon someone whose most likely response would be a shudder; nevertheless, Barbara Steele is the cinema's only true contender for the crown-title "Queen of Horror." Screammers from Faye Wray to Jamie Lee Curtis have had successful careers playing plucky survivors, while Ingrid Pitt and Barbara Shelley played their share of vampires, but only Steele ever managed to attain a level of stardom which might justify designating her as the distaff equivalent of a Christopher Lee.

The reason for this is apparent to everyone but Steele herself: she may claim that anyone could have played her dual role in *BLACK SUNDAY*, but in truth her moody expressiveness and mesmerizing eyes invested the characters with a sexual electricity, entrancing but not explicit, that blurred distinction between vampire and victim, making each equally attractive. This and her other screen appearances exude not a conven-



This oft-reproduced shot from *BLACK SUNDAY* has become a genre icon, even inspiring the cover art for Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's vampire novel *The Palace*.

tional Hollywood starlet prettiness but a brooding, even dangerous, sensuality quite appropriate to the Gothic settings which so often surrounded her.

She could be a live-action incarnation of Disney's Evil Queen from *SNOW WHITE*, or she could be the ancient but attractive demon Lilith made flesh—the eternal temptress whose charms allure us even as we sense her deadly nature. As Riccardo Freda, one of the directors who entombed her in the dungeon of type-casting from which she never escaped, told *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* #7 in 1963, "...her eyes are metaphysical, unreal, impossible...There are times, in certain conditions of light and color, when her face assumes a cast that doesn't appear to be quite human."

In spite of the cult of horror stardom surrounding her, Steele would prefer to be remembered for her art house offerings, *8 1/2* (1962) and *YOUNG TORLESS* (1966). Though she speaks fondly of horror directors Mario Bava, Antonio Margheriti, and Freda, she obviously feels her most gratifying acting challenges came from working





Innocent images of Steele from her pre-horror days. Below: she began her career at Rank in films like *SAPPHIRE*. Above: After her contract was sold to Fox, she worked three days on *FLAMING STAR* with Elvis Presley.



with Federico Fellini and Volker Schlöndorff. As Bava lamented in *Terror Fantastic* #3 (1971), "Barbara Steele had the perfect face for my films, but Fellini spoiled her."

Because of this, she is somewhat loath to discuss her horror films, but when she does open up, she can be surprisingly articulate on the subject, indicating it is not so

much the genre as the type-casting that irks her. The Queen of Horror she may not want to be, but at least she acknowledges the effectiveness of some of her efforts, and she even has some insights into what made them horrifying.

Born in Britain, 1938, Steele had no long-term thespian aspirations when she joined a small repertory company on

**"Horror films rely, at least the ones I have made, on atmosphere—which is fantastic. I just wish they could couple that with an intelligent script."**

Brighton Pier; she was only looking for an easy way to finance her preferred career path, which was traveling to Paris to become a painter. Instead, she was discovered by the Rank Organization and signed to a seven-year contract, which made her the last starlet to attend Rank's acting school. This was during the tail-end of the era when studios would slowly nurture a young career, and the actress found herself playing small parts in a number of forgotten films, beginning with Wolf Rilla's *BACHELOR OF HEARTS* (1958). "They just shoved us into a new film every three weeks then—seriously!" she recalls. "There were a lot of minor roles in four or five movies back to back, and I was totally unconscious of what was going down."

When her Rank contract was bought by 20th Century Fox, she moved to Hollywood, where after two years her only assignment was a disastrous stint on the Elvis Presley vehicle, *FLAMING STAR*. Macho director Don Siegel (*INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*), who would guide Clint Eastwood, Lee Marvin, and Richard Widmark through some of their finest moments, was never known for his delicate handling of women, and Fox was somewhat foolishly trying to mold their young actress into a typical studio starlet, a mold she obviously could not fit. After three days in blond hair, Steele created a major scandal by storming off the set, flying to New York, and refusing to return, thus ending her Hollywood career. (She was replaced by Barbara Eden.) When an actors' strike transpired shortly thereafter, Fox technically could not prevent her from seeking employment elsewhere. She took the op-

portunity to fly to Italy, and the rest is horror-movie history.

**T**he gifted cinematographer Mario Bava was preparing his directorial debut, based on Nikolai Gogol's short story, "The Vii," and Steele found herself cast in dual roles: as Princess Asa, a 17th-century vampire sentenced to burn at the stake, and as Princess Katia, the 19th-century descendant whose life force will revive her ancestor. *MASK OF THE DEMON* (1960—released in the U.S. as *BLACK SUNDAY* one year later) gloriously launched her career in Italian horror, making her an instant cult celebrity. Ironically, the films that followed never lived up to this auspicious beginning—*BLACK SUNDAY* remains her one and only true genre masterpiece.

The film's greatness she attributes completely to its director. "He really geared it to play out all his cinematographic-visual fantasies, and I think that one of the strongest points of the movie is the look of it," she claims. "It's just fortuitous for

*NIGHTMARE CASTLE*, known in Italy as "Lovers from Beyond the Grave."





an actress to find herself in something that well-structured."

According to Steele, recollecting details of the production is like trying to remember her high school prom; nevertheless, she does recall the experience as one of creative chaos guided by the one man who knew how all the pieces would fit together. "I never saw a completed script for *BLACK SUNDAY*," she says. "We were given the pages day to day. We had hardly any idea of what was ever going down on that film. We had no idea of the end or the beginning, either. I'm sure he had, or maybe he hadn't. Fellini worked like that on *8 1/2* also."

Steele remembers Bava as a quiet, low-key figure, who could afford little time to spend with his cast—quite the opposite of the more feverish, highly charged Italian directors who would handle her later films. "He was very delicate with us, very shy and removed, inhibited and distant. Very subjective and obviously [gifted] with this fabulous vision that he had. He was trying to direct and be cinematographer at the same time; also, he was deathly ill. So was everybody else. We were all dying during the shooting of *BLACK SUNDAY*. It was freezing. We shot for three or four weeks in December; there was no heat, and it was one of those arctic Roman winters. Everyone had some terrible virus, and every-

The ghostly lovers return, seeking to avenge themselves for their murder.



**THE LONG HAIR OF DEATH.** Above: a candid shot. Below: an effigy of Death covered with long hair, which gives the film its strange title.

one was asphyxiated by all the dry ice! It's just as well that the film was dubbed later, because everyone was utterly nasal!"

Like Vincent Price while shooting the final scene in *THE FLY*, Steele had occasional difficulty keeping a straight face amidst the somber proceedings, at one point requiring seventeen takes to perform a scene with leading man John Richardson. "There comes a point of non-departure when you start to laugh," she explains. "Then you laugh at the fact you're nervous; then you become so guilty you can't stop. Then the entire crew is laughing along. Mario Bava nearly had a heart attack at the very end—we thought we were never going to get it. I just couldn't look at John in the eye anymore. I'd look at his nose, the left part of his forehead, anything."

This was not Steele's first appearance with her co-star, with whom she had practically had a parallel career. "I'd made three or four films with him," she recalls. "We were under contract at Rank; then later we were both under contract at Fox. In fact, I did this massive screen test for my



Rank contract; and John, who was so beautiful, and who had never seen a play, was picked up walking down Bond Street one day by a talent scout. He told me he had never been inside a theatre in his life, because he was a sailor. They thought they could train his voice, so they did this mute screen test of him smoking a pipe—and he got a seven-year contract! He had a very small voice, not like the voice in the film at all. The dubbing ended up a plus for him and a minus for me, because in actual fact he has a much lighter voice. The deeper voice gave him a great presence, I thought."

This was Steele's first encounter with having her voice dubbed by another actress, a misfortune that plagued much of her early career. Due to the vagaries of Italian film production and distribution (each member of the international

cast delivers dialogue in his native language, and then separate versions are dubbed for export to different countries), none of the originally recorded sound is used, and producers sometimes avoid the expense of recalling the original cast, instead relying on actors who specialize in post-dubbing. "Their stages are not sound-proofed, so Italian directors talk all through the takes," Steele elaborates. "Then you're probably up in Hong Kong when they finally come around to looping it."

Ironically, when American International Pictures purchased U.S. distribution rights, they added a new soundtrack anyway (including a Les Baxter score) rather than rely on the provided English-language export version, released in England as *REVENGE OF THE VAMPIRE* with the original Roberto Nicolosi music.



Unfortunately, A.I.P., too, neglected to use Steele's voice. "There I was in Europe—I wasn't about to get off my terrace and come over here!" she laughs. "I wish I had dubbed a lot of them. It's bizarre how everything changes when it's put into English, especially an emotional language like Italian—it sounds so self-conscious and Victorian when it's translated."

If *BLACK SUNDAY* and her subsequent genre efforts survived poor dubbing, Steele thinks it is because they emphasized atmospheric visuals rather than dramatic writing. "Horror films rely, at least the ones that I have made, to such an extent on atmosphere," she observes, "which is fantastic. I just wish they could have coupled that with an intelligent script. I don't know why there was such a discrepancy. The cinematography was sumptuous—there was such concern for it; but there was absolutely no concern for psychological interplay between the people—it was very secondary."

The Gothic atmosphere of *BLACK SUNDAY* was greatly enhanced by Bava's black-and-white photography, which Steele prefers to the less-distinguished color used in some of her later efforts. "I think that black-and-white movies are much more subjective, and they reach the unconscious on

Steele is seen here in one of her favorite movies, Federico Fellini's surreal masterpiece of cinema, *8 1/2*.



**"Black-and-white movies are more subjective and reach the unconscious on a more profound level than films in color, especially in this genre."**



Steele played a seductive but sympathetic vampire-ghost in *CASTLE OF BLOOD*, the first of two efforts for director Antonio Margheriti.

a much more profound level than films in color, especially in this genre," she asserts. "There's no doubt about it: you put your own reading into black-and-white, whereas color is so literal that it's less intimate, especially when you're dealing with that kind of material. I'm very biased toward black-and-white. I like the look of all those movies shot in the '30s and all those divine Japanese flicks."

The black-and-white approach also helped render cinematic violence in stark rather than lurid terms. For its time, *BLACK SUNDAY* had its share of graphic moments, such as when Princess Asa's inquisitors brand her flesh and hammer a spiked mask onto her face. "The really gory and blatant stuff was pretty outrageous," she acknowledges. "Doing that always disturbed me, and I guess it always will. I can't really disassociate myself from that feeling of discomfort."

On the strength of *BLACK SUNDAY*, A.I.P. hired Steele to costar with Vincent Price in *THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM*, the second in their

Edgar Allan Poe series. Playing the supposedly late wife of Nicholas Medina (Price), she appears mostly in flashback until the film's third act, when her "death" is revealed as part of a plot to drive Medina insane. Steele manages the near impossible task of matching arched eyebrows with Price, her physical expressiveness helping to alleviate the fact that once again A.I.P. had another actress replace her voice.

On the set of *CRIMSON ALTAR*: Steele, Christopher Lee, Boris Karloff and director Vernon Sewell. Sadly, the horror stars have no scenes together.



Her first American film, (while in town, she also appeared in the *ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS* episode "Beta Delta Gamma"), *THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM* is fun in a campy kind of way, with Price pulling out all the stops and never once making a straight face. Steele recalls that producer-director Roger Corman, the stylish mastermind behind the Poe series, "was a master mechanic, and I really enjoyed working with him. It was shot at a little studio in Hollywood that had one run-down sound stage. I was very shy at that period, so I was extremely frightened when I did that film. I was struck at the idea that I was working in the States. Vincent Price was very supportive. He's an extremely intelligent and very cultured man. I think I was just frozen in my own particular panic then; I wasn't sure of what was going on around me at the time, but I must say they sent me a most glorious bunch of fresh flowers on the first day of shooting. What could be better? I like them better than money and almost as much as love!"

The love affair was over as soon as A.I.P. re-dubbed her voice ("re-dubbing" is definitely the term, since Steele had previously looped her own dialogue), and Steele appeared in no subsequent Poe films, a fact which doesn't disappoint her at all. "Oh, no no no!" she responds when the subject of more Poe is suggested. "I want to play a fabulous vamp



instead of a fabulous vampire! I want to drag myself around a room with great Afghan dogs and throw myself on a lounge with a cigarette holder in my hand. If I can't do that, then I want to play a housewife in a scruffy Cardigan who gets to kill her husband."

**R**eturning to Italy, in 1962 Steele appeared in the first of two DR. HICHCOCK films for director Riccardo Freda: *THE TERRIBLE SECRET OF DR. HICHCOCK* (U.S.: *THE HORRIBLE DR. HICHCOCK*). A watchable effort, the film pales in comparison to *BLACK SUNDAY*. Freda's work, though admired in some cult circles, lacks the bravura stylishness of Bava's; also, the screenplay was hardly written under the most inspiring circumstances. "THE TERRIBLE SECRET OF DR. HICHCOCK was made on a \$10,000 bet between Riccardo Freda and two friends of his," according to Steele. "They said they didn't believe he could get a script written and financed in a week. He did it—he had a script written in two days. He was an incredible gambler, Freda. That's all he really cared about."

Nonetheless, Steele disagrees with those critics who think that Bava made better use of her talents. "They feel that way because *BLACK SUNDAY* is the best of the genre films I made—the final result was most perfected in terms of the whole film, but I don't feel it was best for me as an actress," she states. "In actual fact, I must say that Freda, in terms of acting, was the best to work with. He was really there for everybody. And he loved to work—or he was obliged to work—under very tight schedules. Both of the HICHCOCK films were made in ten days, so you'd get terribly strung out because you were literally working 17-18 hours a day, and doing close-ups after 18 hours is not the best way to look terrific. But he had such passion for his work—you could really feel this energy directed right out at you. Italian crews are fantastic for that. They're so intensely



The ominous glare in this early publicity still seems to contradict Steele's statement that "You look absurd being melodramatic when you're young."

interested, and if they like something, they'll applaud."

Next, Steele landed a small but memorable role in Fellini's surreal and self-reflexive masterpiece *8 1/2* (1962). In this film-within-a-film about a director (Marcello Mastroianni) afraid of having nothing left to say, Steele basically plays herself, a British actress living in Italy, but a dream-fantasy sequence does provide a few weird moments not entirely out of sync with her screen image, and in a treat for her fans, she actually gets to speak with her own voice. Despite the brevity of her role, Steele considers working with Fellini to be one of the great experiences of her career. "Fellini has this extreme democratic love of everybody," she proclaims. "It's immaterial to him whether you're Marcello Mastroianni or some extra working three hundred feet in the background. He will give them all a point of view, so he receives this incredible allegiance."

Waxing enthusiastic, Steele adds, "He has this incredible quality, as if he casts a spell

he's an extraordinary man, practically a holy man. His vision is so large and so personal, and he's so uncompromised. And he doesn't seem to carry any bitterness with him, and he's had a lot of difficulties. It is extraordinary that someone has that kind of vision. I think they should just make him a national institution and give him carte blanche and let him do what he has to do without going through any of those wretched formalities!"

Because of his improvisational methods, Fellini kept Steele on the set throughout most of the production, in case he came up with a new scene for her; however, she did manage to squeeze *THE GHOST*, a HICHCOCK "sequel," into her schedule. "On *8 1/2*, I think I was paid a \$1000 for a four-month contract, but they let me off at intervals to do other movies," she explained. "I was in the middle of one of Riccardo Freda's when I got this mad call from Federico in the middle of the night, saying, 'We've got this great sequence.' I said, 'I can't—I've got another third of this film to shoot in the next two days.' So I lost a great sequence in *8 1/2* because of that."

The incident was, perhaps, symbolic of the way that horror was increasingly dominating her employment. Steele wanted *8 1/2* to mark a new career path; instead, she found her-

After *BLACK SUNDAY*, AIP imported Steele to co-star with Vincent Price in *THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM*, the second of their Poe adaptations.







# IL LAGO DI SATANA

EASTMANCOLOR - SCOPE DELLA TECNOSTAMPA

This Italian poster for *THE SHE BEAST* (here called "The Lake of Satan") features Steele much more prominently than the actual film.

self cast in more genre fare. In fact, one of her great regrets is never having worked with Fellini again. "I was going to do a role in *CASANOVA* as a Venetian alchemist, but the first three weeks of footage got kidnapped, so there were a lot of rewrites and changes, and finally the part was struck," she says wistfully, then adds, "I count that everybody who's worked with him would always like to work with him again, or take a walk through a meadow with him—it really doesn't matter! Everybody that has ever

met him just wants to keep in touch with him. He'll call you up—you haven't spoken to him for months—and say, 'I'm coming four o'clock Tuesday for mint julep and poached eggs.' Once he called me up in Paris at four in the morning—I hadn't spoken to him for about a year—and said, 'Barbara, what are you dreaming?'"

*THE GHOST* (1963) is typical of the rest of Steele's Italian career—a competent but routine genre item distinguished mostly by her presence. Until its conclusion, the film is a fairly drab mystery-thriller, with a plot that seems almost an inversion of *THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM*: Dr. Hichcock fakes his death

and poses as a ghost to drive his wife (Steele) insane. Fortunately, he succeeds all too well: in the final reel, all hell breaks loose, and Steele gets to display those qualities which inspired Freda's quote about her face appearing not quite human. (Incidentally, since the title character died in the fiery conclusion of a *THE HORRIBLE DR. HICHCOCK*, the only continuity between *THE GHOST* and its predecessor is the use of the surname.)

The remainder of Steele's Italian career grows somewhat obscure for American viewers. She appeared in numerous films over the next several years, but many of them, especially those not in the genre, reached these shores barely if at all. In fact, the actress once complained in an interview that "the horrors are the only films one hears about," while the films she did "for love and nothing end up in late-night showings at the Tokyo Film Festival." With the advent of video, this situation is changing to some degree; so far, typically, only the lost horror titles are becoming available, much to Steele's chagrin.

"Why I was typed in that genre *I have no idea*," she emphasizes. "Perhaps it was just a progressive momentum: one movie was successful; therefore, after two or three, and especially after four or five, it became difficult to suddenly put me in a romantic comedy. I don't believe my capabilities were limited [by the genre association], but I do believe it was difficult for people to see me in another light. They see me behind that veil and have

this preconceived idea of who I am. I very much enjoy playing human beings. But you have to approach these roles, of course, as if they're people."

*DANCE MACABRE* (1963), the first of two films for director Antonio Margheriti, was distributed to the U.S. in an abridged version entitled *CASTLE OF BLOOD* (whereas the video bears the title *CASTLE OF TERROR*). The film is perhaps best known to cult enthusiasts because of a behind-the-scenes anecdote about a shot that never made it across the Atlantic: Margheriti got Steele to kiss female co-star Margrete Robsahm by directing her to close her eyes and imagine kissing a man. Nevertheless, even in edited form, *CASTLE OF BLOOD* is not without merit. Margheriti's talent lies on a spectrum somewhere between that of Freda and Bava: he is every bit as fond of clichéd atmosphere and Gothic melodrama as Freda, yet he has a better grasp of how to integrate these elements into a satisfying film, and the scripts he worked from were less incoherent.

Also, despite Steele's affection for Freda, it is clear that Margheriti made better use of her talents. The *HICHCOCK* films reduced her for the most part to hysterical victim roles; *CASTLE* casts her as a seductive but sympathetic ghost who falls in love with a man trying to win a bet by spending the night in a haunted castle. In a neat twist ending, the hero dies on the verge of escaping the castle's other, malevolent spirits, but a ghostly voice-over portrays him reunited with

"Why I was typed in that genre *I have no idea*," claims Steele, but even in this early glamour still she couldn't help an expression of mock horror."





**“I think Bava was a director’s director as opposed to an actor’s director. He did not work with us on any concept particularly. We just fell into it.”**

Steele’s character. Somehow the thought of an eternity spent with Steele hardly seems tragic.

Steele and Margheriti re-teamed in 1964 for *THE LONG HAIR OF DEATH*, which was not released in this country until Sinister Cinema’s video cassette in 1991. The strange title, apparently a reference to the hair on a wicker effigy burned at the climax, is never clearly justified; although it sounds like a colloquialism along the lines of “the long arm of the law,” even the film’s star is at a loss for explanation: “To the best of my knowledge, it was just something made up for the movie,” she recalls. “You would think it means something. She should have tied him up with her long braids and strangled him—it would have made more sense, right? Actually, most of these titles were just thrown on at the last minute, after finishing the film. They made these faceless movies and the afterward tried to give them an identity.”

An improvement over *CAS- TLE OF BLOOD*, the film casts Steele as a 15th-century woman who returns from the grave to avenge the wrongful execution of her mother as a witch; unfortunately, the supernatural revenge takes a rather mundane form, with the character hiding her true nature and acting more like a scheming adulteress than an avenging spirit. Luckily, this defect in the screenplay is offset by some stylish direction. For whole moments at a time, as when Steele kneels in the burned-out funeral pyre and raises her mother’s ashes to the winds, Margheriti attains a level of visual poetry on par with Bava. To paraphrase a remark by Montague Summers, had the whole film sustained such a level, we would have a complete masterpiece.

Comparing Margheriti to her other Italian horror directors, Steele has this to say: “Bava was like a ghost, a man in silent shoes—you could barely feel his presence. Margheriti was exactly the opposite—very assertive, emotional, and aggressive. I really liked him very much, but I had enormous collisions with him, and it’s very strange that I worked with him twice. I don’t know whether you felt it in those films, but we had total conflict all the way. But that worked for me and for him, too; I guess he wanted a certain kind of rage and energy from me. Freda is very seductive and intimate with his actors: he takes them aside, gives them little cookies and drinks, and tells them they’re beautiful and wonderful. I think that Bava was a director’s director as opposed to being an actor’s director. He was totally concerned with the look of the film. He didn’t work on any concept with the actors particularly; we just fell into it. The roles I did with Freda and Margheriti were much more emotional. In *BLACK SUNDAY*, I maintained a certain kind of abstract quality and held back.”

**S**teele’s remaining Italian horror films are negligible. In 1965, she appeared in three: *FIVE GRAVES FOR A MEDIUM*, *NIGHTMARE CASTLE*, and *AN ANGEL FOR SATAN*. The first one (released in the U.S. as *TERROR CREATURES FROM THE GRAVE*) has its share of creepy moments, especially when the shadowy terror creatures rise from the grave at the climax; but the pacing is slow, and Steele’s role is small. An English-language version of *ANGEL* has only recently become avail-



able in this country, courtesy of Something Weird Video, but the image is poor and the story of little interest (Steele’s prim housewife is supposedly possessed by the evil spirit of an ancestor inhabiting a statue, but it turns out she was actually hypnotized by her malevolent husband). The better picture quality of Sinister Cinema’s videocassette will help you appreciate the film’s few interesting visual moments, as when Steele removes her clothes (photographed waist up) and flogs a male victim with a horse-whip; but you will need a bilingual friend to translate the unsubtitled Italian dialogue.

*NIGHTMARE CASTLE*, like

*BLACK SUNDAY* was called “Mask of the Demon” overseas. “I look at my filmography and think, ‘I haven’t made 120 films—each has 8 titles.’”

most of Steele’s other films from this period, originally had a different title, which translates as *LOVERS FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE*. “A dreadful title,” she admits, “but it sounds much better in Italian: *AMANTI D’OLTRETOMBA*. I look at my filmography and think, ‘I haven’t made 120 movies—each film’s got seven or eight titles.’” The plot concerns a mad doctor who murders his unfaithful wife, then marries her sister (both played by Steele); his plan to drive his new bride insane, and thus



gain control of the family fortune, is thwarted when the spirit of his first wife returns from the grave. Though far from great, the film has at least a few redeeming elements for Steele fans: it provides the actress with the most screen time since *BLACK SUNDAY*; the dual role allows her to stretch a bit, playing both femme fatale and innocent victim (and occasionally the innocent victim possessed by the femme fatale); and she actually dubs the second wife—the one and only time her real voice is heard in any of her Italian horror efforts. “I played this conflict of duality in my personality in virtually all my films, so playing the dual role wasn’t too much of a leap,” she says, adding that providing one of the voices “gave a greater distance between the characters. Because you’ve got the same face, even though wearing a blond wig, the different voices made the distinction feel more genuine.”

In 1966 producer Paul Maslansky claims to have paid Steele \$5000 to work “22 hours straight” on *THE SHE BEAST*, the directorial debut of cult-horror auteur Michael Reeves (*WITCH-FINDER GENERAL*/*THE CONQUEROR WORM*). “That’s absolutely true,” Steele confirms. “I had an incredible head-on fight with Maslansky, who has since produced all of the *POLICE*

The original title of *THE HORRIBLE DR. HICHCOCK* translates as “The Horrible Secret of Dr. Hichcock, a reference to the doctor’s necrophilia.



“...in certain conditions of light, her face assumes a cast that doesn’t appear quite human.” This poster from *THE GHOST* illustrates Freda’s point.

ACADEMY movies.” Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that, once again, the actress was not around to post-dub her performance. Her brief screen time provides name value and little else to the threadbare production, which is of more interest to auteur analysts of Reeves’ career than to Steele fans. Of her young director, she recalls, “Michael Reeves was very charming and quite shy. Of course, he was born ten years

too soon. I think he would have been a brilliant director had he been born around the era of Spielberg. I don’t think he had that much opportunity back then.”

That year also marked her favorite performance, in *YOUNG TORLESS*, the debut effort of German director Volker Schlöndorff, best known to American audiences for *THE TIN DRUM* and *THE HANDMAID’S TALE*. In this anti-fascist parable set in a repressive boys academy, she plays a woman of easy virtue who initiates the students into adult sexuality. “In retrospect, I suppose I like *YOUNG TORLESS* the most,” Steele declares. “I would say Volker Schlöndorff captured me most effectively, maybe because it was a role which I liked. I liked the conflict and vulnerability, so I could extract more. He’s a sensational director to work with.”

Steele followed *YOUNG TORLESS* with episodes of *SECRET AGENT* and *I SPY*. At the time, she had accepted the horror label to the extent of looking forward to working with Christopher Lee, another English-emigrant actor who had

risen to stardom in a string of Italian horror movies; in fact, she once claimed having had a “drunken lunch” with the actor “about once a year,” during which they laid plans for their own “really gorgeous” horror movie with “minimal melodrama” and a “lot of good taste.” However, she had no interest in following Lee’s footsteps back to Hammer Films. “I never would have gone back to England unless it was to theatre,” she explains. “After living in Italy, it’s tough to go back and live in England. It’s much more suppressive. Italian films in that period were very vital and sumptuous. In England, it was a very bitter, dreary period.” Nevertheless, she did fly across the English Channel to co-star with Lee and Boris Karloff in Tigon Films’ 1967 effort *THE CURSE OF THE CRIMSON ALTAR* (U.S. title: *THE CRIMSON CULT*). It was the British actress’s first and only British horror film—and her last theatrical feature for several years.

A weak effort allegedly based on Lovecraft’s fine novelette “Dreams in the Witch House,” the film has admirers (including David Pirie in *A Heritage of Horror*), but Steele is not among them, frankly admitting she accepted the project only for the money. “I just flew in and did that to pay the rent,” she laughs. Appearing with her co-stars provided some compensation. “I adored Boris Karloff,” she exclaims. “He had a sort of nobility about him, and a sadness and humanity about his presence. His age, his charm, and his dignity were completely fantastic. Christopher Lee was something else again. Christopher Lee has a much more theatrical ego than Karloff.” Sadly, the three horror stars have no scenes together and, despite their billing, play supporting roles upstaged by the boring young ingenues.

**A**fter *CRIMSON ALTAR*, Steele took stock of where her career was heading and what the industry was offering. She was tired of horror and, more significantly, tired of limited parts: Since





**“I realized I’d overreacted in every film, because in a state of real terror, I could just stare, transfixed, instead of rolling my eyes and going, ‘Argh!’”**

PIT AND THE PENDULUM, virtually every horror role had been some variation of the scheming adulteress or innocent bride, either driving her husband mad or being driven mad by her husband; moreover, despite top billing in the credits, these parts were usually secondary to the mad doctors, nefarious husbands, or young heroes who garnered most of the screen time. Rather than endure the role of former starlet fading from the screen, Steele opted to retire, though from her comments at the time (“Like Hermione Gingold I’ll start again at 90!”) it is apparent that she intended less a permanent retirement than a temporary sabbatical, which she hoped would dissipate her horror image and allow her to return in more dignified, character roles.

“I swear I’m never going to climb out of another coffin as long as I live!” she announced and, married to an American screenwriter, moved to the United States. Her career remained mostly dormant for the following years because, she explains, “I wasn’t looking for work at the time—that was the period of my marriage to

James Poe. Talk about self-fulfilling prophecies,” she laughs at the coincidence of surnames, “marrying a man named Poe!”

This gap provides a convenient division in her career. When she returned to the screen, it would be in character parts designed to fit a name actor into a low-budget film; nevermore would she appear in star vehicles designed to exploit her own particular charisma.

Looking back on this first phase of her career, Steele is extremely critical of herself and of her type-casting, but the intervening years have granted her a measure of gratitude toward the director and the film that made her a cult celebrity.

“I have total respect for Bava and *BLACK SUNDAY*,” she says, “because visually it is stunning, and that’s what cinema is: visuals and atmosphere. It’s like Rembrandt. As an observer—if I remove myself and think in terms of being a member of the audience—I’m very grateful and respectful toward it. But as an actress, it’s not something that let’s you do any tour-de-

In the prologue of *BLACK SUNDAY*, Steele’s Princess Asa is punished for witchcraft by having the demon’s mask nailed on her face prior to execution.



Steele as the evil and adulterous Muriel in *NIGHTMARE CASTLE*. Steele also played the role of Muriel’s innocent, blond sister, Jenny, not shown.

forcing, and I was very naive at the time. I’m embarrassed about seeing myself, quite frankly.

“I was very young when I did those films, and you look absurd being melodramatic when you’re young. It can work for Vincent Price—he’s a certain age, it’s his make-up, and he has a certain kind of look to crawl around pillars all the time—but it certainly can’t work when you’re twenty. You look totally idiotic, because your face doesn’t live up to what you’re implying. You have to be thrust into all that excessive, intense melodrama, and I was having incredible fights with everybody all down the line, especially on the Mediterranean. They’re so overt—that’s what they want, and that’s what they respond to: this large, magnified reac-

tion to everything all of the time. But in real life it doesn’t occur that way. I really noticed it one hot summer night in Rome, when I was lying naked on these lovely sheets, and I heard someone breaking into my apartment; then I saw the handle to my bedroom door starting to go down. Before I could finally manage to throw myself in the bathroom and call for help, I realized that I’d over-reacted all of my life in every film, because in a state of paralytic terror—and you feel so much more exposed when you’re nude than when you’re in a nightdress—I could just stare, totally transfixed, instead of rolling my eyes and going, ‘Argh!’” □

**PART TWO**, tracing Steele’s subsequent American career, will appear next issue.



# THE DAY DRACULA DIED



The Count gets a rude awakening in *DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE*. "I don't like this at all," said Lee.

## A look back at the undead reign of Christopher Lee.

By Randy Palmer

Thirty-five years ago, horror film history was made when Great Britain's Hammer Films finished their second in what would be a long line of successful Gothic chillers, *DRACULA*. Hammer had already achieved notoriety with their 1957 update of Mary Shelley, *THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, and the film's star, Peter Cushing, was rapidly gaining the international acclaim that had previously eluded him. Cushing's co-star, Christopher Lee, awarded the role of The Creature because he was "lean and mean" at six-feet, four-inches tall, would achieve even greater popularity with his portrayal of Count Dracula.

In fact, so certain had Hammer been of his ability to make a terrific Count that they had offered him the part without testing a single other actor, and Lee found himself on the verge of real success for the first time in his career. Soon after *HORROR OF DRACULA* (U.S. title) opened, Lee began receiving fan mail from around the world—most of it from women who found his interpretation of Dracula "dangerously alluring." Part of the appeal was rooted in Jimmy Sangster's screenplay, but Lee's



*HORROR OF DRACULA* established Christopher Lee as rightful heir to Bela Lugosi's throne. Lee based his interpretation on "a little Stoker" and some ideas of his own.

contributions to the role were not slight. As he was fond of pointing out in interviews, Lee "created the walk, the talk, the movements and the look," which were a combination of "a little Stoker" and his own ideas.

Despite the success of *HORROR OF DRACULA*, Hammer did not make a direct sequel for seven years. A mid-'60s interview in Lee's *Fan Club Journal* quoted him as saying he "didn't do [a sequel to *HORROR OF DRACULA*] until seven years later because they [Hammer] didn't want to make another." In a later interview, Lee stated that he hadn't

wanted to repeat the role too soon for fear of being typecast. (Lee did, of course, appear in *TEMPI DURI PERI I VAMPIRI*—*HARD TIMES FOR VAMPIRES*—a year after *HORROR OF DRACULA*, but he considers the Italian spoof a comedy with no bearing on his performances in the horror genre.) An examination of the "final shooting script" for the 1960 film *BRIDES OF DRACULA* seems to support Lee's claim: the picture's working title was *DRACULA II*, tempting one to speculate that Sangster may have written a direct follow-up which was later reworked as a semi-sequel, sans Dracula, by

co-credited Peter Bryan and Edward Percy.

However, with *REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, Hammer had already established a precedent for spinning sequels around Cushing's doctors rather than Lee's monsters. With Lee unwilling or unavailable, Hammer decided to make a "non-Dracula Dracula film" while audience awareness was still at a peak, with Cushing reprising his Dr. Van Helsing character from the earlier picture. With a title like *BRIDES OF DRACULA*, fans of the first film would surely want to see the new one, and, as long as it was good, most probably wouldn't care that Lee's Count Dracula was in absentia—or so Hammer thought. Even with a major promotional push, the "sequel" was far less successful than the original.

It wasn't until after the success of a 1964 double-bill re-release of *CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN/HORROR OF DRACULA* that the specter of Dracula loomed large once again. With Lee now available and willing to reprise the role, Hammer asked Sangster to script what was tentatively known as *DRACULA II* (again). Other *HORROR OF DRACULA* alumni, such as set designer Bernard





DRACULA A.D. 1972 is considered the worst in the series by many, but Lee has said, "In a weird way, it quite works."

Robinson, composer James Bernard, and director Terence Fisher came on board, but one significant piece of the puzzle was missing: Cushing, whose Van Helsing would not reappear in the series for another six years.

Once filming got underway on what would eventually be released as DRACULA—PRINCE OF DARKNESS, Christopher Lee told his fan club press, "The new DRACULA shows all the signs of being another hit. All the [sets, costumes, props] look very good, and the performances are every bit as good as the first. I think this one may well be even more frightening!" Interestingly, after the picture was released, Lee seemed to have second thoughts and in later years referred to the film as "lacking." He got annoyed at Terence Fisher for insisting he wear red contact lenses that gave his eyes a bloodshot appearance in almost every scene for three reasons: one, they hurt; two, he couldn't see straight and three, in the first film Dracula's eyes only turned red when he was angry or threatened. Lee was probably right in protesting, because the chilling effect was diluted by its overuse. (Director Freddie Francis, who would helm the next in the series, made the same mistake by using extreme closeups of the blood-

shot eyes over and over.)

Fans of the series were puzzled that Dracula wasn't given any dialogue in DRACULA—PRINCE OF DARKNESS. In the many years since the film was made, undoubtedly memories have become clouded, but depending on who was being interviewed the reason given for Dracula's silence often differed. Terence Fisher claimed that was the way Hammer wanted it: Hammer said there was no dialogue in Sangster's original script, and Sangster, like Dracula, wasn't talking. Lee was quoted at various times as insisting that there either was or was not dialogue. In an interview given shortly after the film finished shooting he maintained there was no dialogue in the shootings script because Dracula was supposed to be a kind of "spiritual essence" as opposed to the flesh-and-blood personality he was in the first film. (The undead Dracula, having been destroyed at the conclusion of HORROR OF DRACULA, was thus dead twice over by the time he was resurrected in the sequel. I don't understand how this is supposed to explain his lack of dialogue, but apparently somebody at Hammer thought this made sense at the time.) To complicate matters further, years later Lee stated simply that he *refused* to speak the lines that were in

Sangster's script. He may have been confusing the film with the one that followed, but Sangster himself declined to take screen credit (using the pseudonym "John Sansom"), indicating he felt the film did not represent his script.

Unfortunately, things got even more complicated. Lee has claimed he also refused to recite some of the lines of the John Elder (Anthony Hinds) script for DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE (1968). He has also said he had to make up his own dialogue for that film. (Perhaps he did both by changing lines in the script.) In reports from the film set, Lee assured his fan club that "all seems to be going well [with DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE]. The story is adequate, but the production and direction are good, and I even manage to say something occasionally"—evidently a reference to the silence he suffered throughout DRACULA—PRINCE OF DARKNESS. In accordance with his set report, the finished film turned out better than the previous one, and shortly after principal photography was concluded, Lee offered, "[It] is virtually the same mixture as before, although it is possible that the direction of Freddie Francis has been less pedestrian than that of Terence Fisher. I've seen

very little of the [completed] film, but what I did see was up to standard."

One thing Lee particularly disliked was the climax, in which Dracula escapes being staked, but ends up impaled on an oversized crucifix. "I don't like [this] at all," Lee complained, "but...Hammer insists." The scene was considered by most viewers a "show-stopper." Coupled with Freddie Francis' visually oriented style, such over-the-top sequences helped make DRACULA HAS

Afraid of typecasting, Lee did not reprise his most famous role until DRACULA, PRINCE OF DARKNESS.





# WHAT DRACULA IS UP TO

*Lee's latest is CYBER EDEN,  
a virtual-reality fantasy.*

By Bill Kelley

Christopher Lee is back, starring in an Italian genre film, but there's a vast gulf between CYBER EDEN—a futuristic, high-tech fantasy about strange children and eternal youth—and the low-budget chillers Lee made in between his first and second Hammer Dracula films. For one thing, CYBER EDEN is reputed to be the most expensive Italian feature ever made—roughly \$20 million. For another, Lee isn't playing the sort of sinister bogeyman he essayed in UNCLE WAS A VAMPIRE (1959), Mario Bava's THE WHIP AND THE BODY (1962), or Antonio Marghereti's THE VIRGIN OF NUREMBERG (1962).

In fact, it's a challenge for Lee, one of the acting community's most articulate raconteurs, to sum up the plot line in one sentence—which definitely distinguishes it from the visually stylish but narratively quaint Italian genre movies of the '60s. "Basically, the movie's about immortality," says Lee. "There's an older woman (Carroll Baker), whose company produces a cream which sets back old age, and she employs a group of children who are in the Einstein bracket of intellectual capability to help her develop it. I play the woman's butler, who's also her best friend and confidant."

The film also marks a return to Italy for Baker, who retreated to Europe when Paramount Pictures dropped her contract after such costly flops as THE CARPETBAGGERS (1964) and HARLOW (1965). Before returning to America in the mid '70s, she settled in Rome, where she made nearly a dozen films, mostly for prolific genre hack Umberto Lenzi. Lee says he and Baker "became fast friends. She's got a wonderful sense of humor; and, believe me, she needed

it, because we all had to work very hard to deal with such potential obstacles as language barriers and the weather, which didn't cooperate."

Shooting began October 1991 at the legendary Cinecittà Studios in Rome and extended for five months, including location forays to the northern Italian region near Lake Como, where Roger Corman shot FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND.

Production was complicated by the fact that neither director Mario Orfinie nor leading man Adriano Celentano spoke English. Though Lee speaks fluent Italian, neither Baker nor the other English-speaking cast member, Kate Vernon (daughter of DIRTY HARRY's John Vernon), do. "That understandably lengthens the already long time it takes to make a film in the fantasy genre," observes Lee. "The movie is in English, so Adriano spoke it phonetically as we shot. We had to get it right each time, as much as possible, so that when Adriano got it right, Carroll and I wouldn't have made a mistake on our end."

According to Lee, the key to CYBER EDEN's fantasy element is the children. In some ways, their haunting quality and prodigious intelligence suggest THESE



Lee as Cedric the butler and CINEMA PARADISO's Toto Cascio as Cosimo, one of the "young geniuses who create a computer world and enter into it."

ARE THE DAMNED (1951), Joseph Losey's highly regarded Hammer film. In that movie, as in CYBER EDEN, the young cast's intellectual superiority clashes with their innate immaturity. "They are, after all, still children," says Lee. "But they are geniuses who create a computer world and find they can enter it and interact with other characters, who are computer generated."

If this sounds like a knock-off of Disney's ill-fated TRON, Lee is quick to counter that the Italian movie "is about much more than what this superficial description suggests." Celentano is hired by Baker and Lee "to teach the children the true meanings and values of life. But the real reason he's employed by us is that he's the stupidest person we can find. In truth, though, because he's a simpleton, he turns out to have a pure and simple view of life...and Carroll and I are wrong."

"I have never adequately succeeded in describing this film since I made it," Lee concludes. "But I do think it could be immensely successful because it's extraordinary. There is some romance, there is some comedy, sure, but it's got a very strong fantasy element that is quite original and refreshing. I was really intrigued by it. And that doesn't always happen for me. Visually, it's magnificent...and I want to see what they did with all our hard work!" □

Lee with co-star Kate Vernon (daughter of DIRTY HARRY'S John Vernon) as a rejuvenated old woman. "Basically, the movie's about immortality," says Lee.





RISEN FROM THE GRAVE a bigger commercial success than either DRACULA—PRINCE OF DARKNESS or HORROR OF DRACULA.

Depending on which interview one consults, Lee either liked the picture or despised it. During the film's first run, and in direct contradiction to what he had told his fans just months before, Lee charged that the new Dracula "was made with a complete absence of style, taste, or production value. My agent and I are trying to break away from the...type of picture I've been doing...and get into prestige areas." Before the fan club listeners could register the shock Lee added, "This doesn't mean that I will turn my back on the type of picture with which I am most associated, but it does mean I hope to do them in a bigger and better way." Then he dropped the bombshell. "I will only do another Dracula on my terms," the actor stipulated, "and I feel sure that [Hammer] are going to say they cannot afford my salary." Such a statement would normally leave little room for debate, but Lee seemed to contradict himself once again, for less than a year later he was back in the cloak with TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA.

Whether by design or default, the new film managed to keep Dracula mostly off-screen by concentrating on the activities of a group of Victorian decadents who revive the Count and kill his protégé (Ralph Bates) in a memorable black magic ceremony. Dracula then launches a campaign to destroy them by using their own children as instruments of death. Although it's an interesting and unusual concept, one cannot help wondering whether Anthony Hinds deliberately fashioned his screenplay to minimize Dracula's screen time, thereby presumably enabling Hammer to meet Lee's new salary requirements.

Said Lee at the time, again addressing his fan club, "On November 3 [1969], I start what I hope will be my last film for Hammer. The tasteful title is TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA. As usual, words

#### DRACULA DEPLETED

**"I'm at the end of my resourcefulness with the Dracula character," Lee admitted. After "four or five times, there are no more expressions to make or things to do."**



SCARS OF DRACULA was the first in the series to break continuity, in case Lee was replaced, "in which case, there's no need for continuity," he explained.

fail me—as indeed they will also do in the film. Frankly, rather than deliver some of the lines of the script, I would prefer to say nothing at all!"

What came as a surprise to many, however, was that here was the best in the series since Hammer's 1958 original. Even Christopher Lee admitted, "The storyline is unusual to say the least, and...we have an entirely new director, a young Hungarian named Peter Sasdy, so we can all pray for a

fresh approach, since he's the right nationality!" Sasdy, at least, managed to minimize the bloodshot eyes effect, using it strategically to suggest anger or a suffusion of blood—ideas that Lee actually felt comfortable with, although he did take exception to Sasdy's inclination to show Dracula biting his victims' necks and sucking blood in close-up with no cutaways.

Setting aside his periodic threats to give up the role, Lee

starred in the company's fifth Dracula film a very short time later. Released in 1971, SCARS OF DRACULA was again written by Anthony Hinds, but rather than keep Dracula's screen time to a minimum, his script focused on the Count, giving the character more dialogue than the two previous pictures combined.

"There is one extraordinary element in this script," Lee advised his fan club in 1970. "No attempt is made at resuscitation. Dracula is just there, and no explanation is given as to why he is! I think I know the reason for this. The reason they've brought back the character without accounting for his sudden appearance is, I'm quite certain, deliberately contrived in case I should say no [to accepting the role], and they can put in another actor, which they always tell me they're going to do one day, in which case there's no further need for continuity." (A prologue was later filmed, without Lee's involvement, using a mechanical bat which revives the Count by regurgitating blood on his ashes, which reform via reversed footage of his death from TASTE.)

Lee avoided committing to SCARS OF DRACULA until the last possible moment. He admitted, "If there was any other picture available, I wouldn't do [this one], but if my agent can't come up with anything new or different then I'll have to do it. I've reached the end of my resourcefulness with the Dracula character. [After] four or five times you really don't know what to do with it. There are no more faces I can make and no more expressions I can make and very few things that I can do with this character. It's always going to have a sameness about it which I think is disastrous for an actor and rather boring for an audience." Nevertheless, Lee would repeat the role twice more for Hammer and once for schlockmeister Jesus Franco in the disastrous COUNT DRACULA (1970). Initially excited about Franco's project (which he accepted primarily because the director promised it would be the most faithful adaptation of Bram Stoker's novel possible),



Lee now dismisses his participation in that film as a mistake.

Lee's fascination with Stoker's character, as well as the desire to continue making money, prompted him to sign with Hammer to make what fans would christen "the worst" of the series, director Alan Gibson's *DRACULA A.D.* 1972. Hinds had been working on a "Dracula in India" script, which apparently was scheduled at one time to follow *SCARS OF DRACULA*; however, boxoffice receipts for that picture were slim, and Hammer, deciding it was time to do something different with Stoker's character, commissioned Don Houghton to write a modern version.

Though nearly every fan considers the film a failure, Christopher Lee has been quoted as saying, "in a weird way it quite works!" [Lee to Peter Haining, *The Dracula Scrapbook*]. The picture did at least return Cushing to the series after a 12-year absence, playing a descendant of the original Van Helsing who destroyed Dracula in 1872 (a cheat on the storyline of *HORROR OF DRACULA*, which was supposed to take place in the late 1880s). After watching both Dracula and Van Helsing die in the opening segment, the story flashes forward to 1972, where Dracula is revived in a black magic ceremony—a swipe from *TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA*—and plots to make Van Helsing's granddaughter his bride in blood, thereby exacting a terrible revenge against the lineage that destroyed him 100 years earlier. If nothing else, Houghton's script established the best Dracula revenge motif of the entire series. Unfortunately, it was wasted in a story that chains Dracula to the inside of a desecrated church. The gothic setting in which all the Count's scenes take place counteracts the film's primary reason for existing!

Although Lee had been threatening to abandon the series for years, *something* (probably money) lured him back to what would be his final performance as Dracula. Hammer rehired Houghton to concoct a script for another modern-day chapter, entitled

## DRACULA AMNESIA

**"The first one, of course," replied Lee when asked his favorite. "I think I've seen three of them. I can't remember, really, because some I've tried to forget."**



In the first of many memorable deaths, Lee's Count disintegrates at the climax of *HORROR OF DRACULA*, a shot missing from all the English-language prints.

*DRACULA IS DEAD...AND WELL AND LIVING IN LONDON*, which eventually became known as *THE SATANIC RITES OF DRACULA* (1973, U.S. release in 1978 as *COUNT DRACULA AND HIS VAMPIRE BRIDE*). Houghton's convoluted tale of devil worshippers, plague bacillus, terrorist groups, government corruption, high finance—oh, yeah, and Dracula—proved to be a step up from A.D. 1972, but it was too little, too late.

At least Houghton's script tied in directly to the previous film: the opening scene was to have been a reprise of the climax of A.D. 1972, followed by new footage of Van Helsing burying Dracula's relics—ring, clasp and cloak—after the vampire had decayed into dust. The sequence was dropped from the film, and other significant changes were made as well, many for the better (difficult as that may be to believe). The most notable occurs near the end, when the scene as described by Houghton plays very similarly to the finale of *HORROR OF DRACULA*, with Dracula pinning Van

Helsing to the floor in a chokehold and the doctor escaping by playing dead. None of this was filmed. Van Helsing simply climbs out of a window and Dracula gives a chase.

The climax of the film improves on the script, which has Dracula entangled in a hawthorne bush and whining to Van Helsing, "The thorns burn me! They tear at my flesh!" As if this line isn't embarrassing enough, Houghton then allows Dracula to escape the constrictive vines, and, in a rage, lunges at Van Helsing, *who steps aside so that Dracula impales himself on the stakes of a previously unseen fence!* (One can easily envision Bugs Bunny in the Van Helsing role, stepping aside non-chalantly as his nemesis hurls himself headlong into an anvil or other obstacle.)

At least director Alan Gibson used the hawthorne bush and wooden fence (somewhat) intelligently. Not surprisingly, Christopher Lee felt the whole thing was as far removed from Bram Stoker as it could possibly get. He told his fan club the new film was "the final nail in

the coffin as far as I'm concerned. Dracula is presented as a mixture of Dr. No and Howard Hughes." After the film's completion, he told reporters, "I called a halt [to making any more Dracula films]. It was too much. It was the film that finally decided me never to play Dracula again." When asked which of his own Dracula films he liked best, Lee responded pointedly, "The first one, of course." Perhaps the years had blunted his memory when he added, "I think I saw the second. I think I've seen three of them. I can't remember, really, because some of them I've tried to forget."

Lee finally made good on his threat to abandon Dracula, forcing Hammer to scramble for a means of preserving the series. Forgetting the lesson of *BRIDES OF DRACULA*, the company hoped that Cushing's presence could anchor a spinoff series focusing on Van Helsing's ongoing battles against an omnipresent plague of vampires. The idea might have sounded good, but *LEGEND OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN VAMPIRES*, produced in conjunction with Kung-fu specialists Run Run Shaw and directed by Roy Ward Baker (who had helmed *SCARS*), was a critical and financial failure, and the projected series died a quick, merciful death.

Christopher Lee jumped ship at just the right time. After leaving Hammer he won coveted roles in *THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN*, *THE THREE MUSKETEERS* and other productions. After moving to Hollywood in the late '70s, he appeared in diverse pictures, only occasionally returning to the fantasy field for projects he felt were worthwhile, like *THE HOWLING 2* (go figure) and Joe Dante's *GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH*. Even so, none of Lee's recent projects are as memorable as many of the pictures he made at Hammer. And while the actor is growing rather long in the tooth these days with no help at all from Hammer, fantasy fans will always remember him as cinema's best post-Lugosi vampire, no matter how many other fangsters may come and go. □



# THE DAY DRACULA MORPHIED

*High-tech effects replaced old-fashioned opticals.*

By Jay Stevenson

With the laserdisc release allowing frame-by-frame examination of BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA, anal retentive viewers can now confirm what they suspected since seeing the film theatrically: despite director Francis Ford Coppola's expressed intention to film all the effects, using old-fashioned, "in-camera" techniques, the final result contains modern, high-tech post-production opticals. "Oh, yeah," Coppola admitted during editing, "in any film you do final opticals, miniatures and a lot of stuff that wasn't on the stage."

One of the things that was on stage was a miniature of Castle Dracula, but shots of it were replaced during post-production. "They were not happy with some of them, so we're replacing them," said Matte World's Mike Pagrazzio at the time. His work, which consisted of compositing live-action plates with mattes on original negative, at least tied in with Coppola's intention of filming everything "in-camera." Not all of the effects were so quaint.

The shot of Dracula's death and transfiguration was accomplished by Peter Kuran's Visual Concepts Engineering, under the supervision of Kevin O'Neal. "We started with the original photography that they had shot of the two different Draculas," said O'Neal during the first phase of his work. "We established the effect by doing something that's been done in films like PREDATOR: developing mattes out of the highlights, which creates a sort of 'contour wipe.' From there we started to evolve the shot to discover what technical problems there were and come up with creative imagery that would be more interesting. At that point, they were striving to stick to traditional optical techniques, but with classical optical effects, you're limited to a look that's been seen over and over."

This limitation, plus the fact that the different images of Dracula (shot without VCE's participation) did not line up properly, led to adopting a more modern approach. "We discovered the limitations of the old processes, so we thought it out again with Roman (Coppola, who supervised effects) and Francis," O'Neal explained during the second phase of his work. "That's essentially what led us to computer programming software. We scanned the distinct images of Dracula into the computer and took a morph program but did it in a way that was much more subtle than the SLEEPWALKERS' shock cuts. We created a very lyrical, slower change. Also, we added the rays of light emanating from the cross as they pass along his face and initiate the transformation. Technically, we did the morph and the rays on the computer, but we combined them on the optical printer, to help keep in most respects to the intent of the picture of using traditional effects as much as possible."

Also contributing to the post-production effects work was Gene Warren Jr.'s Fantasy II, which had been involved with the film from the beginning. "We were discussing with Roman this whole conceptual ap-

Lacking the horrific impact of Lee's destruction, Gary Oldman's death and transfiguration were the product of VCE's computer-generated effects work.

proach of trying to do as much as they could during production," Warren recalled. "I was pretty honest about what I thought they could do. They did a lot, but I knew they wouldn't get all of them. It's different from back when they did everything that way. There wasn't any option for one thing, so if you needed the actors back, you got them back. Now, only if it's a disaster and you *must* have them back. Otherwise, you live with it and fix it in post."

Warren originally contracted for 10 to 12 shots, including the montage of Harker's early train trip through the Carpathians, but this number expanded to 65 in post. Still, even if the on-set effects didn't quite work, they provided a useful guide. "It makes it easier, because there it is—that's how the film looks, the style, so we can match it," said Warren. "But it's not just what works, it's what they want. This is a Francis Ford Coppola movie—it has his stamp on it. If it was a Jim Cameron movie, some things would be different." □

One of Matte World's post-production paintings, which replaced the Castle Dracula miniature shot during principle photography by Roman Coppola's 2nd unit.





# MYSTERY

## Take a ride aboard

By Steve Biodrowski

For years comedians have exploited bad movies for laughs. Woody Allen dubbed new dialogue onto a Japanese spy flick to create *WHAT'S UP, TIGER LILY?* This in turn inspired such redubbing efforts as *THE HIDEOUS SUN DEMON; THE SPECIAL EDITION* (with the voice of Jay Leno) and *THE BLOBBERMOUTH* (courtesy of L.A. Connection, a comedy troupe that also improvises new dialogue during screenings of genre turkeys like *PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE*). And of course, horror hosts, from Zacherly to Seymour to Elvira, have raked a film over the coals in between commercial breaks. The problem with the former approach is that obliterating the original dialogue destroys a source of unintentional hilarity; and the latter approach leaves

the film itself untouched, with the host appearing only after each reel.

Comedy Central's *MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000* improves on both ideas by having the host and his robot sidekicks not only introduce each week's cinematic atrocity but actually sit through the entire film, silhouetted as if tin the front row of the theatre, while maintaining a continuous stream of caustic wisecracks. It's an idea so simple that only a very clever person would not overlook it, and over the past four seasons the results have won almost universal accolades from *TV Guide*, *Time*, *People* and even the *Wall Street Journal*.

This innovative little show originates in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Series creator Joel Hodgson had a brush with fame in the '80s, performing stand-up comedy on *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* and *LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN* before deciding against life in the big city and returning home. After co-writing an HBO comedy special with Jerry Seinfeld, Hodgson formed Best Brains Productions with Jim Mallon and put together *MST-3000* at UHF station KTMA in Minneapolis. The premise is simple: as an experiment into the effects of watching bad movies, a hapless astronaut is isolated on board an orbiting satellite and forced to endure screenings of *POD PEOPLE*, *HERCULES*, *THE MAGIC SWORD*, ad nauseum. After 20 episodes, Hodgson and company took their brainchild to the Comedy Channel, which was in dire need of amusing programming. The show became an immediate hit, with critics dubbing it the only worthy survivor of the merger with



Above: series creator and former star Joel Hodgson. Below: Hodgson and robot sidekicks Crow and Tom Servo, puppets Hodgson himself built from spare parts.





# SCIENCE THEATER

## Comedy Central's wacky Satellite of Love.

rival Ha Network, which resulted in Comedy Central three years ago.

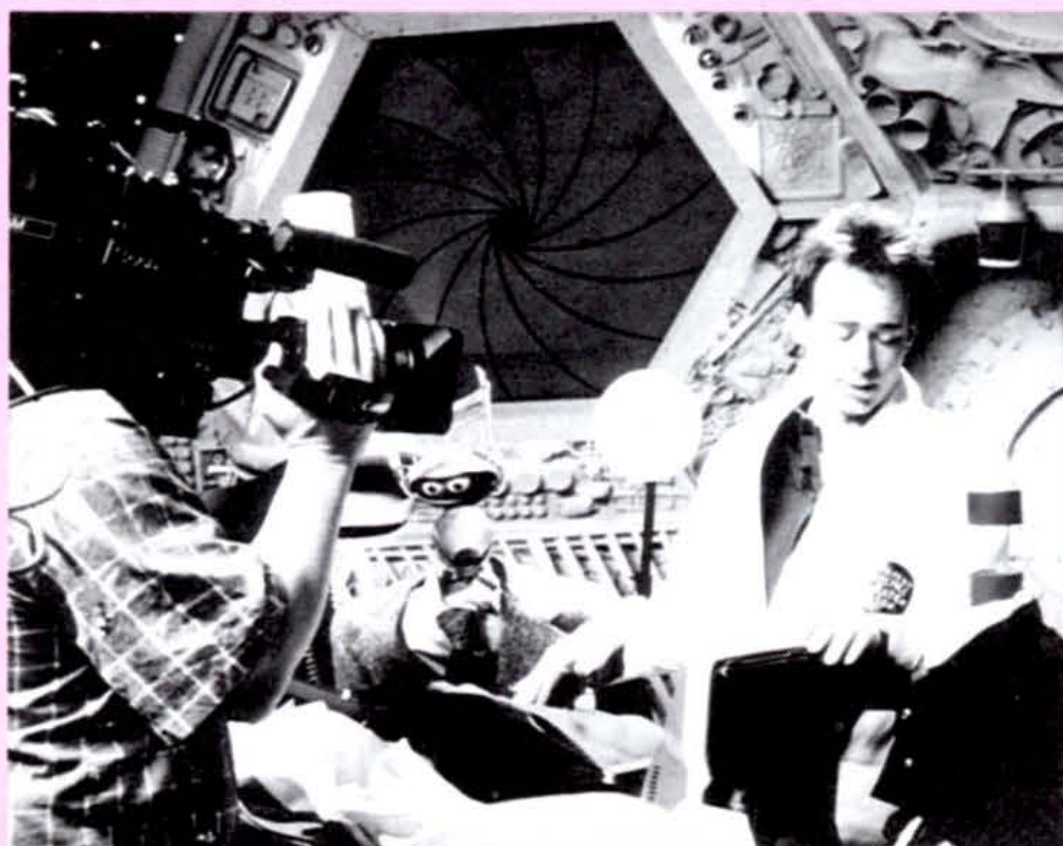
"It's based on the premise that people talk back to bad movies," explains Hodgson. "Old Warner Bros cartoons used to do that. Shadows would rise up and say stuff. Setting it in space [provides] a motivation: if these films are hard to watch, why don't these guys leave?"

The films *are* hard to watch, and in many cases audiences *would* get up and leave—or at least change the channel—if not for Joel and friends. Comedy Central owners Viacom and Home Box Office spend as little as possible on fees for the films obtained. "HBO secures the rights and they don't want to spend more than they have to, so they really get the worst that's out there," claims Hodgson. "The very bottom of the movie catalogue list is what we watch and use."

According to writer and set designer Trace Bealieu, who also provides the voice for robot Crow and plays evil scientist Dr. Forrester, only one out of every ten films screened is chosen. "We try to find films that have a lot of action," he says. "It's great if they've got goofy special effects and if there's a lot of space for commenting."

"We really like made-for-TV stuff and disaster movies, but those have been a little hard for us to come by," adds Hodgson, who likes to maintain a balance between old and new cinematic *ineptitude*. "We like older movies, because they had so many dramatic pauses, where you can fit in a lot of jokes. Last season was heavy in Japanese and in Arkoff. We had a great time with *THE AMAZING COLOSSAL MAN*, and we ended up doing all the

**"It's based on the premise that people talk back to bad movies," Hodgson explains. "Setting it in space provides motivation: if the films are bad, why not leave?"**



Not all of the show consists of hurling invective at each week's movie: here, Joel and company tape one of the vignettes bracketing the commercial breaks.

GAMMERA movies."

Although MST-3000 began its fourth season with the star-studded disaster *MAROONED* (retitled *SPACE TRAVELERS*), more often the films are completely unknown, even to cult fans and camp enthusiasts. Hodgson has second thoughts about taking on more familiar titles. "With these different camps, who really cherish these movies, like the *Psychotronic* people, sometimes I get a little nervous," he admits. "I wouldn't want to foray too far into movies that people really care about."

Although Hodgson may fear fan reaction, on at least one occasion an actor had the

sense of humor to appreciate the merciless lampooning he received: Miles O'Keefe called after seeing the show's treatment of his low-budget sword-and-sorcery epic, *CAVE DWELLERS*. "He's a super nice guy," recalls Hodgson. "We're working on a possible theatrical version of *MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER*, and he might do a cameo for us. We've gotten better reviews than most movies ever do, so we figure it would be a fun theatrical event, especially in the face of all these expensive theatrical movies that are coming out and bombing. Ours would be low budget, like our show."

In a way, the show's

strength is its low budget. Best Brains is very much a team effort, with everyone wearing many hats. Besides Bealieu and Hodgson, who also built the robot puppets, the writing staff includes Mike Nelson, technical director Kevin Murphy (voice of robot Tom Servo) and Frank Conniff (who plays Forrester's bumbling assistant). The entire team writes jokes during a screening of the week's movie; later, staff reviews the film and integrates new jokes written at home. Head writers Nelson and Conniff then assign lines to the three characters and write the final script, which is carefully time-coded. After a day of rehearsal, host segments are shot; viewing segments follow the next day.

"Trace and Kevin are on their backs with their puppets, and we're sitting in front of a blue screen, with the scripts in front of us," Hodgson explains. "They're 30 pages long, with between 600-700 remarks. We do all our improvising in the writing room, because there are so many jokes that if you start goofing off too much, you'll throw everyone off. All we're seeing is a time code and a blank screen—and there's a video monitor we can view when we interact with the image on screen."

Despite the tight scripting, the show maintains the impromptu feel, as if the characters were reacting to each film for the first time. Hodgson credits this to the experience of making 100 episodes. "Nobody's ever done anything like this, we have had to invent all our methodology as we've gone along," he states. "We're learning that we can embellish. If Kevin does a big soliloquy, Trace can hop in with a line."



# THEATER REVIEW

*"...the crie de coeur of the bad film fanatic."*

By Dan Persons

It's structured like a kid's show. It plays like COUNT FLOYD MEETS THE FIRESIGN THEATRE. It's MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000. While the majority of the screen is dominated by some scraping from the bottom of the cinematic barrel (including an impressive catalog of '50s educational shorts), the crew of the Satellite of Love sit at the bottom of the frame, hurling comments, insults, and just general abuse at the histrionics unfolding before them.

It doesn't get more simple than that, and therein lies the danger: with films so bad, just about anyone could park his/her butt in a seat and get off on a few quick laughs. To their credit, Hodgson and company are scrupulous in avoiding cheap shots, choosing instead to dig for quirkier gold. In the average MST-3000 episode, plots are deconstructed on the fly, actors are involuntarily subjected to rounds of "Separated at Birth?" (the prize winner was the little boy in the Japanese monster movie who bore a painful resemblance to Roseanne Arnold), and the background music gets intriguing new lyrics (often cursing the producers for foisting such tripe off on the public). All told, the MST-3000 players form an impressively deft troupe, a fact readily apparent during the sequences that bracket commercial breaks, whereas sketches and musical interludes can range anywhere from a Tor Johnson fashion show to a ballad saluting the supporting turtles of the



After 100 episodes, Joel Hodgson jumped ship last October.

GAMMERA series (this featuring Murphy's quite lovely singing voice), to the musical tribute in honor of Japanese schlock distributor Sandy Frank. Granted, it's a predictable irony that the balsam-and-pasteboard production values of these sequences are frequently better than the films they satirize, but given some of the easiest material in the world to ridicule, the MST-3000 performers have gone the extra step and wisely chosen not to condescend.

Which means their audience may have to work a bit to keep up. While most of the humor is restricted to areas accessible to the general public, these guys are nothing if not eclectic in their tastes. On occasion, it helps if you've kept up with your reading, frequented the progressive rock section of your record store, and listened to National Public Radio. That way, you'll understand the

occasional references to obscure David Byrne songs, the punch lines that invoke Ursula LeGuin novels and why, when a synthesized soundtrack develops a rhythmic, repetitive motif, Servo utters in a hushed voice, "Next on *Music from...the Hearts...of...Space...*"

Actually, it's the more obscure references that are the special pleasure of MST-3000—there's something gratifying about encountering minds that can take some tacky piece of junk and make associations at once both subtle and hilarious. Behind the hostility and ridicule, one senses a sort of grudging admiration for these found bits of cinematic strangeness, an acknowledgment that, although the MST-3000 troupe must work hard for their laughs, these films come by their (largely unintentional) humor with little or no effort. "You know," Servo blurted out halfway through one of the GAMMERA epics, when the giant, jet-propelled turtle began performing a series of gymnastic stunts on the exposed pipes of an industrial park, "it just struck me how really ...weird...this movie is!" It was almost the *crie de coeur* of the bad-film fanatic, a revelation of that blinding moment when summary rejection turns into guilty pleasure. By reveling in the artistry to be found in the patently artless, and for reassuring audiences that there may be something of value to be discovered in even the ripest of trash, the practitioners of the MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 perform a definite, if offbeat, service. May the Satellite of Love's orbit never decay. □

Although Comedy Central is a basic cable service, not a premium channel, MST-3000 has had few censorship problems. A rare exception concerned a favorite juvenile insult the characters like to hurl at the screen. "The biggest thing that came down the road is that we were criticized for using the word 'dickweed,'" Hodgson recounts, "and we challenged them on that. Fortunately, nobody really knows what 'dickweed' means, so we use it a lot."

This incident stands in contrast to the channel's usual non-interference, which Hodgson credits for MST-3000's success. "One of the reasons our show works," he says, "is that the Comedy Channel was so busy in the beginning with other shows that they had to leave us alone out of necessity. On top of that, we had done 20 shows before we started with them, so nobody knew more than we did. They don't interfere much. We might talk to them every two weeks or so. We send them the rough cuts and the script for approval, but we're really left alone to do whatever we please."

The humorous nature of the show keeps some of the films' gory moments intact—but only if they're cheesy. "We did a movie called SIDEHACKERS that had a very brutal rape-and-murder scene. We had to do a lot of editing to make that film work for us," explains Beaulieu.

"We decided on it before we saw the whole movie," adds Hodgson. "We watched the first 15 minutes and said, 'This is perfect!' Then, 16 minutes into it, somebody got brutally murdered, so we had to cut it out. When they're dark movies, they're hard to do, because you have to be dark to be funny about them. They tend to get depressing—some movies are really dreadful. The ones that are fun and buoyant are more fun to do."

Part of the fun of MST-3000 is that, despite sets, props and costumes, which might suggest a kiddie-show format, the humor covers a wide range, from simple puns to obscure references sure to fly over the heads of younger audiences.





Top: Behind the scenes, Kevin Murphy and Trace Beaulieu operate Servo and Crow. Left: semi-regular robot Gypsy join the trio, voice of Jim Mallon.



For instance, a lethargic dialogue exchange draws the peanut-gallery response: "This thing's got more pauses than a Pinter play!" Says Hodgson, "There's such a huge number of throwaway jokes per movie that we can afford to do that." He adds that the obscure references don't completely bypass the kiddie audience. "I've talked to little kids who watch the show, and they like to see adults being funny with each other. Even if they don't get every joke, under it all they know we're being funny, and they enjoy that."

"We all come from different backgrounds, and we don't all laugh at the same stuff," adds Beaulieu. "That's part of the [reason for the show's broad appeal.] We do it first to entertain ourselves, though it's not like we're ignoring the audience. We get little kids writing in; some fans in town for a STAR TREK convention stopped by, and one guy works on the particle accelerator at the Fermi laboratory. It's a wide range: little kids and big kids with big toys."

This is all the result of Hodgson's refusal to tailor the show to a specific audience. "The key to making stuff that people will like is to make stuff that

you like," he states. "If you try to imagine your audience, you'll end up making something nobody likes—which is probably what's wrong with most TV. We just do what we think is funny, and it seems to give the show a definite personality. If a TV show will do anything you want it to, then it's not much fun. But if it challenges you and it's funny, then it works."

Indeed, MST-3000 works so well that its audience has expanded beyond anything Hodgson anticipated. Thanks to the expanded channel capacity of new cable technology, Comedy Central finally managed to make MST-3000's fourth season available in such crowded markets as Los Angeles, and a fifth season began airing this summer, featuring such forgettable titles as EE-GAH!, MAGIC VOYAGE OF SINBAD, and WARRIOR OF THE LOST WORLD. "It's really amazing," says Hodgson of the attention his creation has received. "We thought the audience would be really videophile—college through 30—but it's turned out to be broader, from five-year-olds to people in their 50s who get together with their college kids and watch it. It's at the point now where it's pretty unreal, like being in both *People's* and *Newsweek's* Top Ten Shows of the year. That's beyond anything we imagined would happen." □

## THE SATELLITE OF LOVE GETS A NEW CAPTAIN

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 began its fifth season this June, but in October fans had to adjust to the departure of star Joel Hodgson, who stepped behind the camera, after 100 episodes, making room for head writer Mike Nelson to take control of the *Satellite of Love*.

"My biggest interest is creating and developing shows," explains Hodgson. "That's why I started MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000, and because of that interest, I was the logical guy to be on camera. Now that the show's going, I realize I want to be behind the camera. I'll keep writing for MST-3000, and I'm going to be developing new shows."

Mike Nelson, who has made cameo appearances as Gamera and the Amazing Colossal Man among others, admits to being "a little frightened" about taking over the lead. "Our audience tends to be extremely loyal," says Nelson. "Joel has a huge following, and the show is so closely identified with him that naturally it's going to be a little difficult. I'm sure we're going to upset some people, but we kind of feel like 'Where else are they going to go?' It's not like they're going to say, 'Well, I'll watch the other MYSTERY SCIENCE THEA-

TER now.'"

Hodgson believes that fan awareness of the behind-the-scenes nuts-and-bolts of the show will help smooth over the transition. "We've always spent a lot of time, when we've done press, teaching about how we make the show," he says. "Our fans, more than most fans of other shows, are really alert to the realities, and this is just one of them. I think that by and large they'll understand."

Nelson must also contend with trying to fit into the show's established chemistry. "Just because of the reality of the way the show works, the character I'll play will be pretty close to myself, much to the way that Joel's character was to himself. We'll spend some time exploring the relationships—I don't think we ever sat down and figured out how the robots would react to Joel, and I don't think it's possible to do it with me. It's just going to develop naturally. The only thing we've talked about is that I tend to have a little more edge than Joel, so I have to be careful to keep a real friendliness to the show. I think that's important. If we were just a bunch of smartasses, I don't think people would watch. They respond to the friendliness, so I'm interested in keeping that aspect." □

Below: new host Mike Nelson took over the helm last October.



Right: the amazing colossal man, a previous Nelson cameo.





## FILM RATINGS

- Catch It Opening Night
- Worth Seeing First Run
- Catch It Second Run
- Wait For Video/Cable
- Fodder For MST-3K

## THERE'S NOTHING OUT THERE

Directed by: Rolfe Kanefsky. Prism Video, 5/93, 90 mins. With: Craig Peck, Wendy Bednarz, Mark Collver, Bonnie Bowers.

This is a strictly amateurish spoof about a bunch of teens on spring break being picked off one-by-one by a green alien with sharp teeth. The monster, designed by Ken Quinn, is a rubbery puppet wisely shown mostly in glimpses, because it loses all credibility when seen for more than 30 seconds. In the tradition of the pulps of 50 years ago, this alien is interested in eating the men and raping the women, which is what you'd expect from a film that makes the female cast bare their breasts and run around in bikinis in almost every scene.

Worst performance is by lead Craig Peck, whose eyes constantly flick directly into the camera as he declaims his lines as if in a bad high school play. Gimmick is that his character has seen every horror film ever made and points out all the warnings, foreshadowings and things not to do, which his friends naturally ignore. The film, which enjoyed a brief and surprising New York theatrical run before its current life on video, is not aided by bad photography and relentlessly inappropriate music.

○ Judith Harris

## MY BOYFRIEND'S BACK

Directed by: Bob Balaban. Buena Vista, 6/93, 84 mins. With: Andrew Lowrey, Traci Lind, Danny Zorn.

This makes two in a row for Balaban: two bad comedies about cannibalism with Mary Beth Hurt (the other being 1989's even less successful PARENTS). Dull script (originally entitled JOHNNY ZOMBIE) equates teen angst with zombieism, when lovestruck Lowrey is killed but returns the next day in hope of attending the prom with the girl he worships but never had the courage to approach. The few laughs, all displayed in the trailer, are provided solely by some aging character actors: Bob Dishy, Paul Dooley and Austin Pendleton.

○ Judith Harris

## SUPER MARIO BROS.

Directed by: Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel. Buena Vista 5/93, 104 mins. With: Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo, Dennis Hopper.

SUPER MARIO BROS. is an ugly, noisy, stupid mess. A long charmless buildup and frequent dull spots

**WILDER NAPALM** exhibits many of the same tropes that characterized director Glenn Gordon Caron's successful television series **MOONLIGHTING**.



**Candyman (Tony Todd) claims Helen Lyle (Virginia Madsen) as his lover in life and death in CANDYMAN.**

are sure to bore the intended kiddie audience. Yothi, the delightful animatronic dinosaur, is the most interesting character. Unfortunately, he gets little screen time and isn't important to the plot, which involves a parallel universe beneath Brooklyn where dinosaurs evolved into humanoids, led by Dennis Hopper, who has plans to take over the world. This is like a Three Stooges film, wherein each character is stupider than the previous one. The ending leaves the door wide open for the intended sequel. One can only hope it's better than this sad affair.

● Judith Harris

## METEOR MAN

Directed by: Robert Townsend. MGM, 8/93, 100 mins. With: Robert Townsend, James Earl Jones, Maria Gibbs, Robert Guillaume.

Messy, by-the-books fantasy of an ordinary, inner-city man transformed into a very reluctant super-hero-cum-neighborhood-guardian, via the convenient intervention of a "magical, green meteor." Director/writer/star Robert Townsend's strong suits are a satirical mind and an acerbic wit capable of cutting to the core of race issues without invoking the ire of the targets being prodded. Unfortunately, neither trait is much in evidence here (the closest METEOR MAN comes is a wicked scene in which Sinbad plays a newly Afro-centralized man putting the make on Townsend's love-interest—"This is my first black girlfriend," he enthuses). The film is horrendously structured: events occur with no respect for what preceded and themes are raised and dropped in the span of one scene (including the aforementioned love-interest and Townsend's main theme of an individual's responsibility to his/her community). Face it, if there's any sign that a film needed more work at the conceptual stage, it's a fade-out suggesting that a stand-off between Mafia, police and gang-bangers is a happy ending. Robert, are you sure this is the message you wanted to convey?

○ Dan Persons

## WILDER NAPALM

Directed by: Glenn Gordon Caron. TriStar Pictures, 8/93, 110 mins. With: Arliss Howard, Dennis Quaid, Debra Winger, Jim Varney.

Wilder and Wallace (Arliss Howard and Dennis Quaid) are a pair of pyrokinetic brothers in love with Vi-

da (Debra Winger). Reserved, ironically-named Wilder gets the girl; aggressive, short-tempered Wallace burns off all of his brother's hair and disappears for five years only to return with a carnival in tow, a near-fatal fury over the love he lost, and plans to blow the boys' cover on DAVID LETTERMAN. WILDER NAPALM exhibits many of the tropes that characterized the director's successful TV series, MOONLIGHTING, including the splitting of the id and superego into two opposing, yet appealingly-shaded characters and a taste for the supremely offball moment, such as when a volunteer fire department spontaneously bursts (sorry) into doo-wop arrangements while fighting fires. That predilection to reach for the oddball when the merely ordinary would do comes close to destroying the film—particularly in a pivotal scene wherein the two brothers fight over Vida, a sequence so filled with miscues and ill-conceived histrionics, that one loses all sympathy for the participants. That the film manages to recover says much for Caron's talents and for the skills of all three actors. That somebody here failed to say "No," to some of WILDER NAPALM'S more fanciful notions is the film's downfall.

● Dan Persons

## HOCUS POCUS

Directed by: Keny Ortega. Buena Vista, 6/93, 95 mins. With: Bette Midler, Sarah Jessica Parker, Kathy Najimy.

Mick Garris proves he can't write every bit as badly as he can't direct, with this silly tale of Salem witches brought back to life in modern times. But why put all the blame on him when there's Midler to kick around? This film was originally intended as a star vehicle for her until Disney screened the results and switched gears, marketing it as a kiddie movie. Her camp performance comes across like a drag queen's (Divine would have been much better, but he's dead). Her one good moment is singing "I Put a Spell on You," but that hardly warrants the star treatment which places her dead center in every shot in which she appears, relegating her co-stars to the edges of the frame. Did she have this put in her contract for fear of being upstaged? That could easily have happened: Parker not only makes a far more alluring witch; she also gives a better performance. Director Ortega stumbles in every conceivable way, especially with the witches' return from the grave which takes place off-screen. Best moments are a talking cat and a headless zombie, both of whom are well-realized in the effects department; the cat especially gets all the best lines and upstages his human co-stars. Makes one appreciate the superiority of the Nicholas Roeg-Jim Henson collaboration, THE WITCHES.

● Steve Biodrowski

## OVERLOOKED & UNDERRATED

### CANDYMAN

Directed by: Bernard Rose. Columbia TriStar Home Video, 3/93, 98 mins. With: Virginia Madsen, Tony Todd, Xander Berkeley, Kasi Lemmons.

For those who missed this in the theaters, here's another chance to catch this superb film. Based on *The Forbidden*, it's the best Clive Barker adaptation yet. Madsen stars as a grad student researching urban legends. For her thesis, she chooses the story of Candyman, a hook-handed murderer who supposedly appears if you say his name into a mirror five times. She soon finds that Candyman is no myth and what he has in store for her is far worse than anything she could have imagined. Madsen, often stuck with second-rate material, finally has the chance to show off her talent. Co-star Tony Todd is also excellent as the frightening and hypnotic Candyman. The technical aspects of the movie are just as good. Especially noteworthy are the Candyman graffiti, the gothic music by Philip Glass and the cinematography. Although there's some gore involved, this film doesn't rely on pure shock value to chill you to the bone.

●●●● Karen L. Joslin



## CINEMA by Steve Biodrowski

## JURASSIC PARK: Why the Dinosaurs' Detractors Bite

A recent issue of *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER* offered an explanation for belief in paranormal events: the human mind tends to organize information; where no pattern exists, the mind invents to organize information; where not pattern exists, the mind invents one, creating an appearance of the supernatural out of random coincidence. The phenomenon is equally apparent in film criticism, where opinion often has less to do with the work in to a pattern of his own invention. A perfect case in point is the negative reactions to *JURASSIC PARK*. Admittedly, the film has flaws, but few if any of these have been the basis of critical attacks, which instead are based on two alleged patterns.

**PATTERN #1: Big-budget films by their very nature emphasize technique over content; ergo, *JURASSIC* is an effects show devoid of interesting characters or plot.** This argument is the most easily dismissed, because the film is based on a book—which (to overstate the obvious) had no special effects at all. The fact that it still became a best-seller clearly proves there was some appeal to the story even before ILM worked their CGI magic. Also, the further inference that the budget somehow sapped away the characterization is rendered absurd by simply reading the novel: it's not as if Hollywood took a sophisticated character study and turned it into a dumb spectacle; if anything, David Koepp's final draft script improved the characterization. Michael Crichton sets up a dramatic situation, throws his characters into it, and lets the plot illustrate the point he's trying to make. Clearly, the author is more concerned with fascinating ideas than fascinating characters, which quite simply are not necessary to either the book or the film. In fact, it's as absurd to criticize *JURASSIC* for lack of Dostoyevskian characters as it would be to criticize *Crime and Punishment* for lack of Spielbergian special effects.

**PATTERN #2: The film represents the final step down for**



Angry Steven Spielberg supporter eyes one of *JURASSIC PARK*'s specious detractors.

**Steven Spielberg, who has descended from talented artist to commercial hack.** This is the more subjective of the two myths, based less on the path of Spielberg's career than on the maturation of his audience. A sizeable portion of today's movie-goers grew up in the 1970s. Seeing *JAWS* at a young age, they mistook it for a masterpiece, despite its myriad flaws (such as a music score which, despite a memorably ominous main title, made the climactic shark chase seem fun and exciting rather than frightening). As viewers grew older, their perception increased, and once undetected flaws became more apparent to them. This is why Spielberg loses fans with each new film: they're recognizing problems that previously eluded them, while their rose-colored nostalgia glasses prevent them from seeing that these flaws existed from the beginning.

*JURASSIC* is no more flawed than any other Spielberg effort—it has simply suffered from unfair appraisal. If a reviewer went in with the preconceived notion of Spielberg's career as a downhill slide, then of course he saw further evidence of that; this perception, however, is no more valid than that of someone who sees evidence of the paranormal in random events. Spielberg's career is simply too erratic to fit the pattern being imposed. *CLOSE ENCOUNTERS* and *E.T.* were feel-good movies, not good movies, and from them

*JURASSIC PARK*, viewed objectively, is a step up, not down. It may not be perfect, but it is the finest film of the director's career.

This year's other genre items have been deservedly trampled in *JURASSIC*'s tracks. *LAST ACTION HERO* was everything critics accused *JURASSIC* of being: a great premise drowned in formulaic big-budget film-making. John McTier is a fine action director, but he's not the least bit funny; and Schwarzenegger, amusing when playing tongue-in-cheek, grows tiresome when trying an outright spoof. Biggest problem is that the set-up is geared to be a biting satire of lame-brained action movies, but producer Joel Silver was not about to bite the hand that feeds himself, so *ACTION* actually has the nerve to suggest that its kind of entertainment is superior to Olivier's *HAMLET*. Yeah, right.

At least, we can take solace in the fact that we were not part of the film's pre-release hype. In other cases, we are not so fortunate, having devoted much space to films which proved unworthy of our attention. *NEEDFUL THINGS* is exactly the sort of dud one has come to expect whenever the Brand Name of Horror is above the title. There are a few interesting moments early on, thanks to Max Von Sydow and Amanda Plummer, but mostly nothing happens. What's truly amazing is that after this extended, uneventful "build-up," when the town finally does erupt, the au-

dience still doesn't buy it, because the conflicts exploited by Sydow's Leland Gaunt are too trivial to warrant the results.

Even more of a disappointment is *ACTING ON IMPULSE*, dubbed by our sister publication (in a fit of opportunistic optimism) the "FEMME FATALES Movie of the Year." The truth is that the scream queen status of Linda Fiorentino's

Susan Giddes character is irrelevant to the main plot, an obvious add-on gimmick to give a hook to the tired main story, and the murder-mystery sub-plot surrounding her is actually a sub-sub-sub-plot—so

deep it's almost submerged entirely. This film's real focus is on C. Thomas Howell, playing one of those uptight characters who learn to loosen up after getting laid by an exotic woman—the sort thing seen in sophomoric comedies far too many times. Too bad: the film could have been a wonderful cult item, had it lived up to the promise of its opening minutes, which focus on Giddes in Hollywood, among sleazy agents and producers. Once the story shifts to Howell's hotel convention escapades, the going is definitely dull, although Nancy Allen and Fiorentino do have a few good scenes stitched into the story somewhere. Cassandra Peterson and Mary Woronov have cameos, in an attempt to justify the *Femme Fatales* connection, but don't let that fool you into getting your hopes up for this mislabeled effort, which ended up bypassing theatres for a cable debut. □

Max Von Sydow's Leland Gaunt, one of the few pleasures in *NEEDFUL THINGS*.





## LASERDISC

by David Del Valle

## CLASSICS:

*Letterboxed and Restored*



Ferdinand Mayne and Sharon Tate, in a posed publicity still from Polanski's *THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS*.

The laserdisc versions of *THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH* and *THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS* are the best arguments this year for letterboxing films. Although the reputations of both have been damaged by being known mostly in truncated forms, both are seen, beautifully transferred, as their directors intended—uncut and wide-screen.

Both films are a real commitment for the viewer—esoteric works (in completely different ways) by talented auteurs who bend, or even break, genre conventions to suit their purposes.

*FEARLESS* is a clever parody of two Hammer films: *BRIDES OF DRACULA* (read Count Von Krolak's son as Baron Meinster) and *KISS OF THE VAMPIRE* (whose vampires' ball is sent up like a valentine to director Don Sharp.) Many critics dislike *FEARLESS*, either because they have never seen Polanski's complete version,



Tate and Mayne camp it up behind the scenes.

or they fail to appreciate the parody. After all, horror comedies rarely work, and when they do, as in *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN*, it's because the references are clear.

*MAN*, when first released, was a confusing yet dazzling piece of work from a director whose erratic cutting processes and jigsaw images could confound almost any-

one. Being deprived of Roeg's cut made viewing the film vague, to say the least. This splendid transfer may not clear up all of the enigmas, but many answers are there for viewers who choose to seek them out. The audio commentary is well-done: the dry wit of Buck Henry comes off best, and one is surprised at the thoughtfulness of David Bowie's remarks.

Although *FEARLESS* has no audio commentary, its supplemental features include its American Euro-

pean main titles, a trailer, and a charming documentary on Sharon Tate, filmed during the making of *EYE OF THE DEVIL*. Curiously, the female leads in both films are remarkable for different reasons. Tate, beautiful and young, showed promise, and if fate had allowed her to continue, real stardom could have been hers. Candy Clark, in the restored version of *MAN*, gives the perfor-

## Nicholas Roeg on *THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH*

By Mario Falsetto

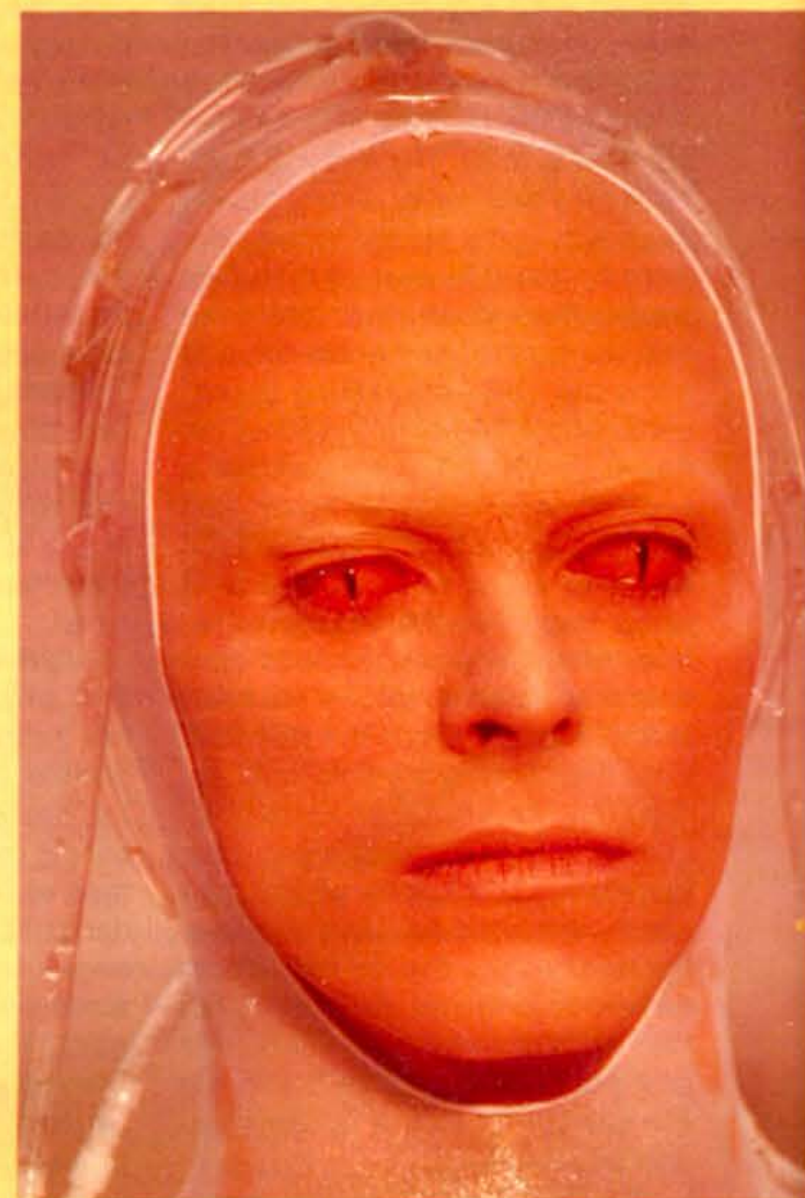
Nicholas Roeg decided to make *THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH* after reading the novel by Walter Tevis, whom the director terms "a strange, marvelous man," adding, "I was drawn to the idea of an alien. What is an alien? I was an alien in America. Newton could get away with posing as an Englishman in America; if you pose as English in England, you'll soon be found out. He was like a refugee in search of something. It struck me that the book would be like a shell for something, and the science-fiction part of it became a perfect disguise."

Roeg found the perfect embodiment of that refugee alien in David Bowie, who excelled despite his lack of acting experience. "He was very good," says Roeg. "He's an extraordinary performer. He was very understanding of the role, right from the first time I went to see him in New York and talked to him about it. He said, 'I'll be there when you want to start,' and he showed up, with his own car and driver, which we used in the film."

Among other things, the film is remarkable for the way Roeg subjects his audience to scenes of sensory overload, as when Newton watches several television screens at once. The intercutting images and loud volume form

a virtual assault on the viewer. "I've been criticized strongly for that," Roeg confides. "There's so much going on in the world. You have to be selective. I don't expect everybody to see everything, but I want the books on the shelves to be books I want that character to have. I want the people in the background to do something, not just walk through. There's a lot going on in life. It's only by miracle we get through every day. We live with this great expectancy that we'll get away with it all the time—charmed, as if nothing bad can happen to us. But it's all going on around us—we're missing things by inches, daily, just physical things, moment to moment."

During its initial release, *MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH* was mangled by its U.S. distributor. Roeg is of course happy that American audiences can now see his cut, but he never let the unpleasant experience weigh too heavily on his mind. "I was worried at the time, but you really have to take a film to pieces to completely ruin it," he explains. "One must believe that they can't ruin a film altogether. You must defend it, and fight with everything, but finally, they own it. You can't follow the stuff around. I remember listening to Orson Welles talk about how *MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS* had been ruined. I'm





mance of her career. It is criminal that so many of her scenes once ended up on the cutting-room floor, but now Criterion allows one to see just how marvelous she is.

The real stand-out in **FEARLESS** is the definitive interpretation of Fredy (now Ferdinand) Mayne as Krolak. He wisely chose to employ the melodious voice of Bela Lugosi while bearing the physicality of Christopher Lee, merging these two greatest Draculas in one performance. So superb is Mayne's performance that the major flaw of Polanski's film is that there are only three scenes in which to enjoy Krolak and his court.

David Bowie is perfectly suited to the role of the alien Mr. Newton, a stranger in a strange and Roeg's eccentric, dreamlike approach to filmmaking perfectly compliments his star's androgyny and otherworldliness. Unusual for the genre is the lack of special effects. Roeg leans in that direction only in flashbacks to Newton's planet and in what can only be described as extraterrestrial sex scenes.

For those of you who have not seen these much maligned and neglected masterworks, they are highly recommended cornerstones of any serious genre collector's library. □

not saying it was right. It's tremendously arrogant to think you can do it better than the filmmaker. They can never think of the film as the filmmaker thinks of it, whatever they do. But at a certain point you have to let go. Once it's finished, I have to move on, or I'd go crazy. People do go crazy following things around.

Despite this mishandling of his work, Roeg insists that, overall, the film industry has supported his eccentric and sophisticated brand of filmmaking. "There's no doubt about that," he claims, adding by way of explanation: "They're probably less pissed-off in the long run than from one 'blockbuster' that went down the drain. God knows that people make a blockbuster and they haven't got the answer next time, after five years of trying to make another, so it evens out. There's ten films of mine that wouldn't add up to the cost of one 'blockbuster' that went down the drain." □

In Nicholas Roeg's **THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH**, John Newton (David Bowie) reveals his true appearance.

## VIDEOPHILE

by Diana J. Zemnick

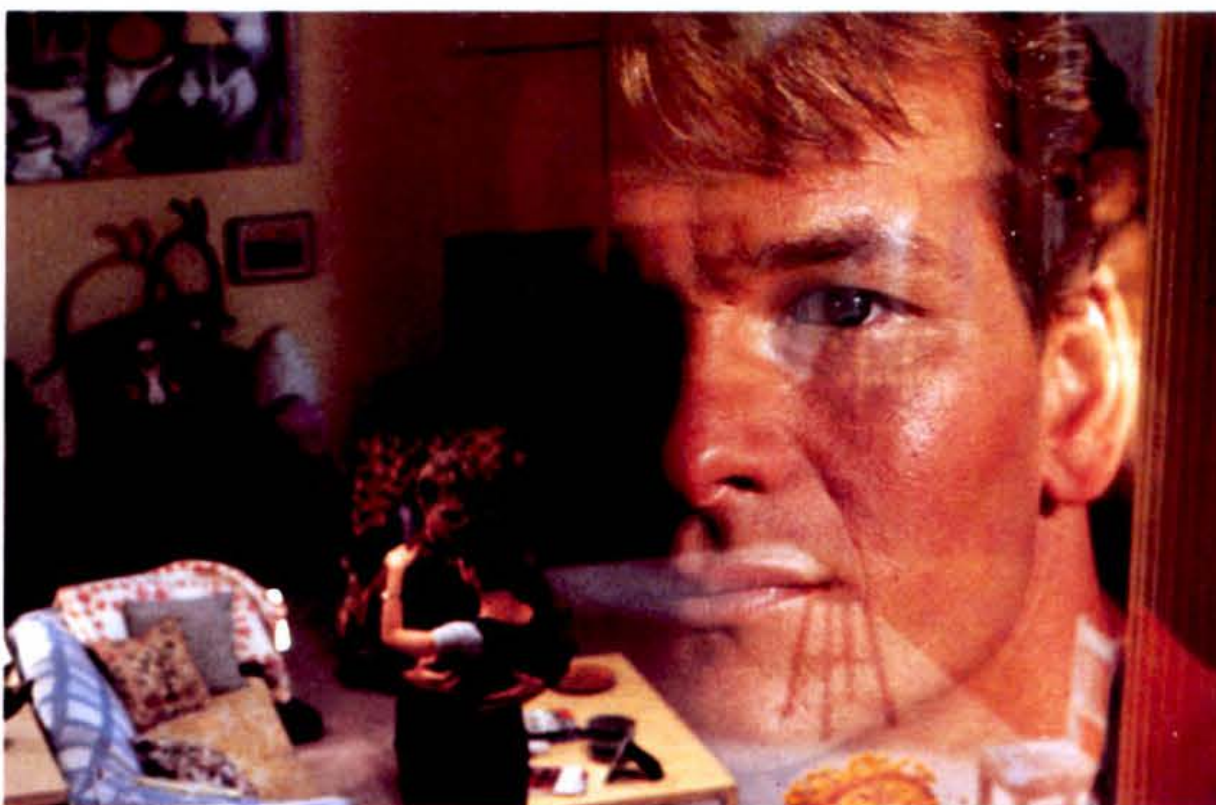
There is a haunting appeal about films that deal with death, ghosts, and love eternal. Some of these spectral delights can be simply terrifying, but others are cheerful and funny, or even seductively haunting. A movie like **GHOST** can even become a symbol—a catalyst, if you will, to consider the prospect of life after death, giving a sense of meaning to the hereafter. With the fabulous direction of Jerry Zucker, this film is a virtual masterpiece, cleverly combining love, mystery, suspense, and even comedy. This is one supernatural thriller which many viewers have already enjoyed experiencing again and again, but there are others worth adding to your video library.

The 1939 favorite **WUTHERING HEIGHTS**, based on Emily Bronte's dynamic literary work, is the darkly romantic story of Cathy and Heathcliff (Merle Oberon and Laurence Olivier), whose ill-fated and turbulent love for each other finds a peaceful resolution only in death. Although the supernatural element is only a framework for the main story, the doom-laden Gothic atmosphere definitely places this entry in the genre.

A wonderfully romantic movie with old-world charm is **THE GHOST AND MRS. MUIR** (1947), directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. This sincere film innocently blends comedy, romance, and sentiment into a heart-warming story of a widow (Gene Tierney) who moves into a seaside cottage inhabited by the ghost of a brash sea captain (Rex Harrison). Relying rather on the simple than the complex, it's an inspiringly unpretentious and utterly timeless classic. The glossy black-and-white effects enhance the mood of the turn-of-the-century period setting, and Bernard Hermann's enchanting musical score brings to the surface the atmosphere and soul of the sea.

A more recent effort is 1983's **THE HAUNTING PASSION**, starring Jane Seymour and Gerald McRaney (**SIMON AND SIMON**) as a married couple who move into a home inhabited by a ghost who mistakes the wife for his lost love. The ghost is arousingly seductive and sensual, luring the wife more and more into his spectral world. With a music score that is eerie, romantic, and thoroughly hypnotic,

## HAUNTING PASSIONS: Ghostly Love Stories



**GHOST**, directed by AIRPLANE's Jerry Zucker, is the most popular recent example of a film offering the spectral appeal of ghosts and love eternal.

**THE HAUNTING PASSION** is a treat for those who favor the hauntingly erotic over the simply terrifying.

**THE FORGOTTEN ONE** (1990) is sure to please in the thrills and chills department. This is one erotic supernatural thriller you'll want to watch with the lights on. Terry O'Quinn (**THE STEPFATHER**) plays a famous novelist who moves into a new house after his wife dies. Thoughts of a new novel are blocked by terrifying dreams of a woman, who eventually materializes in the beautiful but ghostly form of Blair Parker. The novelist falls in love with the ghost and finds himself trapped in the web of her mystical world. If one is in the mood for the bleak and the macabre, with a flavoring of Gothic romance, **THE FORGOTTEN ONE** can fill the prescription. The film never got a theatrical release, but thanks to video, it need not live up to its title.

**TRULY, MADLY, DEEPLY** is a 1991 modern-day ghost story, filmed in England by writer-director Anthony Minghella. The cast (Juliet Stevenson and Alan Rickman, in a rare non-villainous role) lend an air of sophistication to the proceedings, and their tenderness comes through with a style of gentle refinement. This variation on your basic **GHOST** story (a grieving widow is aided by the ghost of her dear departed husband) is charming and touching—a scintillating, misty-eyed love story.

The latest rendition of life-after-death, recently in theatres but destined to make an unfairly quick exit to video, is **HEART AND SOULS**, a delightfully comic and vibrantly rich film. A magical love story, the movie begins when four people from different walks of life take a bus ride that turns out to be their last. Each was on his or her way to a loved one or to correct some wrong into right. Scenes between Robert Downey, Jr. and the four loving ghosts that watch over him (Charles Grodin, Kyra Sedwick, Alfre Woodard, and Tom Sizemore) take on feverish hilarity when one by one they enter his body in order to finish their unfinished tasks. Like Steve Martin in **ALL OF ME**, Downey adopts the mannerisms of the possessing spirit; his timing, delivery, and movement recreate the personalities and characteristics of ghosts with remarkable accuracy. Director Ron Underwood has combined the same compassion and hilarity that infused **CITY SLICKERS** two years ago. If you missed this lyrical, delightful comedy when it was in theatres, don't make the same mistake when it reaches your video shelves.

Although all of these films touch upon a sensitive theme, they do award with a sense of tranquility, peace, and hope in the idea that something tangible and real is waiting for us on the other side of life. □



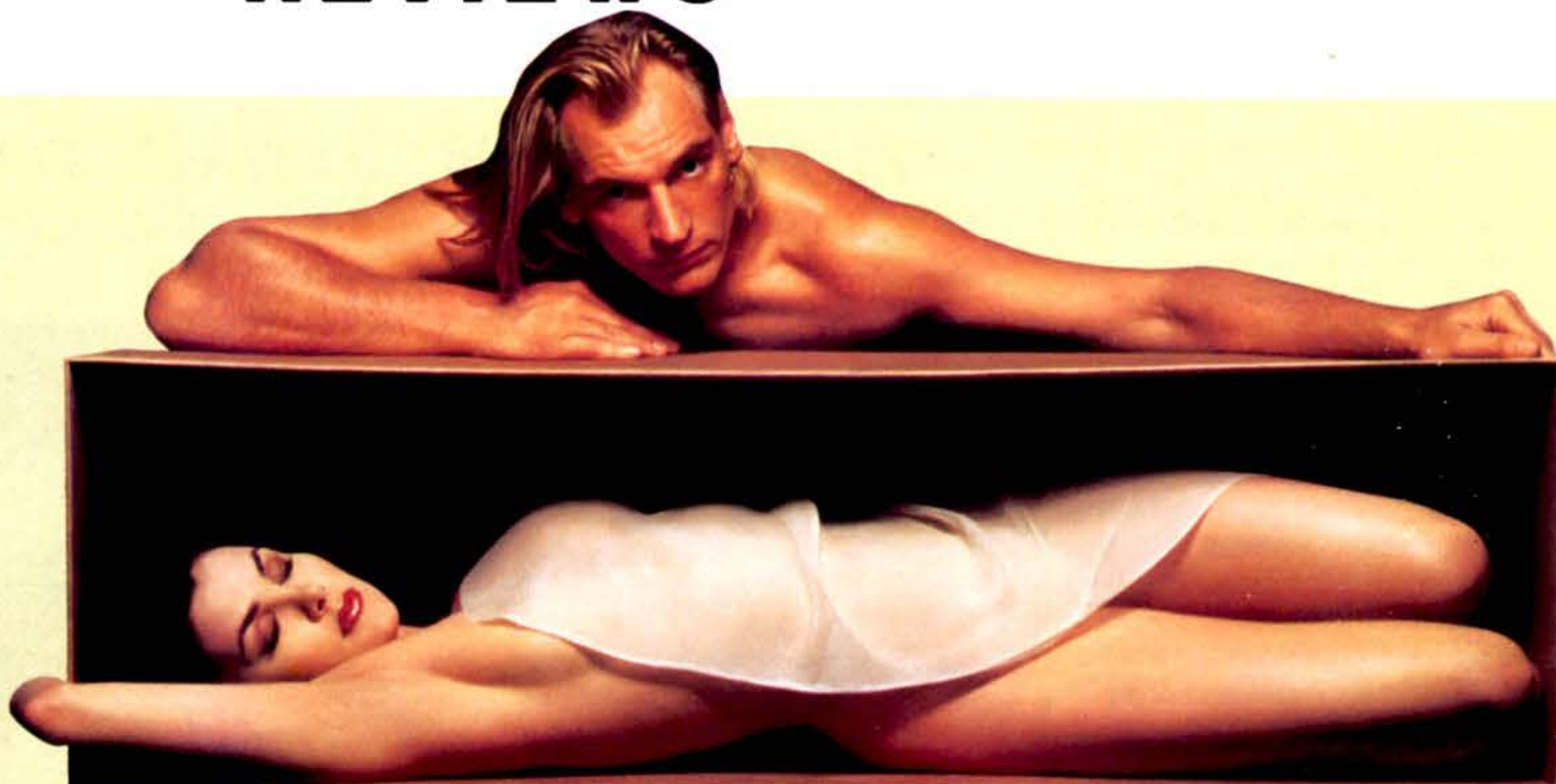
## Jennifer Lynch on Directing BOXING HELENA

By Steve Biodrowski

In September, BOXING HELENA finally arrived in theatres, thanks to Orion Classics. Unfortunately, months of well-publicized delays, including time spent in court and with the MPAA, resulted in the sort of baggage that made it difficult for audiences to view the film on its own terms. Director Jennifer Lynch takes it all in stride, philosophizing, "There's a certain advantage to having had people hear about it for so long, because they're really interested in seeing it; there's also a disadvantage, because I know for myself, when I hear about something, I tend to envision the movie, and I may not envision the movie that they made. That's a lot to compete with."

The film received its biggest pre-release notoriety from casting: both Madonna and Kim Basinger turned down the title role; the later instance resulted in a lawsuit when Basinger backed out after previously committing to the project. Lynch calls the process a "lot of hard work and a lot of fun. The amazing thing was how many people were drawn to [the project]. I think that for the actors it was a tremendous showcase for them to do something nobody else had

Lynch directs Fenn in one of the few moments of on-screen violence: Helena's legs are run over by a car, leaving her at the mercy of an obsessed suitor.



Orion's exotic advertising art failed to draw audiences to Lynch's dark and wonderful tale of obsessive love.

ever done. It's the same old theme of a love story, just with different twists here and there—that's what it really boils down to. So they were excited and calling us, more often than not. I think it was the executives—the suits, shall we say—that were more concerned with their actor's participation."

The irony of the lawsuit against Basinger (which the film's producers won) is that her replacement, Sherilyn Fenn, is by far the better choice, bringing a level of complexity to what would have been merely an unsympathetic bitch with Basinger in the role. Lynch considers the handling of this performance the biggest challenge she faced as a director. "Sherilyn went through a lot of heavy internal stuff," she

recounted. "She and I had discussed this prior to shooting, but I don't think there's any way to fully prepare somebody for being armless and legless. Sherilyn was playing Helena, but Sherilyn was first and foremost in that box. Getting somebody through the initial shock of looking down at themselves with no limbs can be intense. She was amazing. I never expected to get as wonderful a performance as I got—from anybody. I do think the most challenging thing for me emotionally was taking care of Sherilyn, taking care of Helena, and making sure that I could successfully tell the story of someone in control of the situation. Here she appears to be the victim, but *he* is—I think no one's ever seen Julian (Sands) do what he does in this movie. Keeping that balance (was important.) You have to have the ability to step back and be objective, even when you're in the midst of everything. That's obviously the idea of what a director's job is, but it smacked me in the face a little bit harder on this picture, because of what I was asking of the actors. But they were great to work with. I think we all learned a little bit about ourselves."

Portraying Sand's character as a victim rather than victimizer created even more problems for the director, who hopes she won't be blamed for her character's action. "Even worse," she exclaims, "I blame the person he's doing it to and hope I don't get blamed for that! I'm sure that many people would have made this film in different ways. If people are mad at me, it's not the worst thing in the world. It was everyday, all the time,

on my mind that neither one of these people deserves to be a victim. The only way to tell this story and be true to the metaphor was that she's got to be the one who's hurting him, in a sense; she's got to be the one who refuses to change, refuses to back down. It keeps him on the innocent side; it keeps him vulnerable, like a child trying to reach up to the fire on the stove. But mother was never around to tell him, 'Don't touch that—it will burn you.' Well, Helena's the fire on the stove. He'll climb whatever he has to climb to reach her. If we haven't all done this to some degree, I at least can say I've fantasized about it—about giving up everything for someone else.

"I don't think any of us are 100% Nick and Helena," Lynch continued, "but I'd sleep well for the rest of my life if I thought people would go in there accepting that maybe parts of them are parts of both (characters). I've been at some screenings where some people—something's got to be going on in them that they're not quite sure about. I'm not sure what it is, but some things really grate on them and embarrass them, and instead of laughing or taking joy in it, it pisses them off. I apologize for that—I mean, I'm sorry that happens, but at least I got a reaction."

Lynch took these negative reactions into account during editing. "The film has been changed since test screenings," she admitted. "I do recognize the value of opinions I don't agree with. There's obviously something to learn there, even if it's only learning that I'm sure I don't agree



## A surprisingly assured fledgling effort

### BOXING HELENA

A Main Line Pictures release. Directed by Jennifer Lynch. Produced by Carl Mazzocone. Co-produced by Philippe Caland. Executive producer James Schaeffer. Co-executive producer Larry Sugar. Edited by David Finfer. Composed by Graeme Revell.

Nick.....Julian Sands  
Helena.....Sherilyn Fenn  
Ray.....Bill Paxton  
Dr. Palmer.....Kurtwood Smith  
Dr. Augustine.....Art Garfunkel  
Anne.....Betsy Clark  
China.....Nicolette Scorsese

by Steve Biodrowski

If one can forget Kim Basinger's lawyers, Richard Heffner's MPAA, and Jennifer Lynch's father, BOXING HELENA is a surprisingly assured fledgling effort from an obviously talented young writer-director. Lynch herself may decry the genre label, but her insightful examination of obsessive love treads on much of the territory associated with the horror-of-personality sub-genre (e.g., once again, "Mother" is invoked to apologize for the horrible behavior of the sympathetic lead.) The story is simple: Nick (Sands) is obsessed with the beautiful Helena (Fenn), who not only spurns his advances but goes out of her way to antagonize him. Fate intervenes when Helena is run over by a car. Acting without authorization, Nick employs his surgical skills to save Helena's life by amputating her damaged legs. He then tries to win the affection of the now-helpless woman by giving up his hospital job and waiting on her hand-and-foot (you should excuse the expression).

From that point on, the film becomes mostly a two-person character drama. When it becomes apparent to Nick that he still is not in complete control of Helena, he amputates her arms and puts her in a box, turning her into a "living version of the Venus de Milo" (Lynch's words). The strength of the film is two-fold: one, we are properly horrified by Nick's behavior without ever losing sympathy for him; two, the film walks the tightrope of portraying Helena as provocateur rather than victim, without falling into the mistake of implying she deserves her unpleasant fate. In both cases, credit is due to careful performances by the leads, who mine the possibilities in the script while avoiding the potential absurdity inherent in the outrageousness of the situation.

On the direction side, Lynch



Attending a party at the invitation of Nick, Helena proceeds to embarrass and humiliate him, making a seductive spectacle of herself by wading in a fountain.

proves herself with some amusing black comedy, including a wheelchair-bound attempt by Helena to roll for assistance that somehow manages to be funny without destroying the delicate fabric of whole. The film's voyeuristic moments are also well-handled explicit but not exploitative.

In fact, the only real misstep is the "it's only a dream" ending. Lynch claims this is no cop-out but a way to avoid apparently condoning Nick's actions; more likely, she found she had written herself into a corner from which she could not

write herself out. The problem is not so much the ending's lack of resolution as its incompatibility with what preceded. The interplay between Helena and Nick is simply too convincing, too *real*. An obsessed fanatic like Nick could never have dreamed this story; in fact, the whole point is that Helena refuses to conform to his idealized dream. The strength of that conflict (including a marvelous soliloquy wherein Helena tells Nick how he *should* treat women) far outweighs the miscalculated conclusion. □

with it. Sometimes, there's a lot to be learned from someone who says, 'I hated this,' if you can find out *why*. A lot of things have been redefined in the final cut; hopefully, it brought me closer to where I want to be."

Even with these refinements, the MPAA ratings board originally handed the film an NC-17. Minor trims were made, but the film still received the adults-only rating when re-screened in July. Fortunately, an appeal earned an R, maintaining the film's integrity without further cuts. Lynch speculated, "I think a lot of what was affecting people were the images they were getting in their heads, not what they were seeing—the insinuation of things that happened, whether they be sexual or violent. But it's a very gentle picture. It is not 'The McCullough Chainsaw Massacre!'"

On a more prosaic note, Lynch found her first time in the director's chair to be an educational experience; fortunately, the fact that she was also the screenwriter gave her a helpful perspective. "To be honest with you, as many times as possible, within the limitations of the set, I put the camera where I imagined being when I wrote the script. Because there's a tremendous number of voyeuristic moments in the film, I wanted people to feel as if they were participating in these characters' lives, almost as if they were a fly on the wall. Plus, it breaks so many rules: We're not used to somebody climbing up a tree to look in on somebody having sex—unless, they're criminals or sickos. We're not used to the normal, average person driving by (and spying on) somebody's house, though we've probably all done it,

continued on page 61

Helena makes love with her dumbfuck rock-n-roller boyfriend (Paxton), unaware that Nick is spying on them.





## THE SCORE

by Anthony P. Montesanto

## BODY SNATCHERS

*Joe Delia Manipulates via Music*

It's after dark in New York City, and film composer Joe Delia is sitting in a recording studio, focused at the keyboards. Pervading the room is the steady beating pulse of a human heart. Music producer Peter Fish adroitly manipulates the timbre and rhythm. The sound of the heartbeat builds steadily. Then, from the back of the studio... "Can we make them strings?" The question is from director Abel Ferrara (*BAD LIEUTENANT*). He wants to know if the rhythm of the heartbeat can take on the melodic characteristics of pizzicato orchestral strings. The answer is "yes," and the musicians proceed to metamorphosize the sound into an eerie hybrid.

The film being scored is Warner Bros' *BODY SNATCHERS*, the third adaptation of Jack Finney's durable story of alien invasion and evil within. Ferrara is adding his own brand of horror to the classic tale, with the longtime friend and composer Joe Delia. Delia is to Ferrara what John Williams is to Steven Spielberg. Since being introduced to each other nearly 20 years ago, the two have worked together on eight films.

For *BODY SNATCHERS*, a revolutionary approach to scoring is being employed. Using state-of-the-art equipment at National Sound studios in New York, Delia is able—along with Fish, creative director of the studio complex—to compose in ways he hasn't tried before. The Synclavier—the most sophisticated instrument in the world—has allowed Delia to *micro-score* the film, putting down and modifying theme after theme while *BODY SNATCHERS* is still being edited.

Ferrara, subscribing to the auteur approach, influences every stage of his film, including scoring. The Synclavier seems tailor-made for his stream-of-consciousness creativity. As a result, Delia's scores are organic, with the ability to change at any time during the process: "Never a bit of music goes into Abel's films that he doesn't feel is right," says Delia. "He likes to have near-finished music in hand as he structures his films."

Delia, (known in music circles as "Killer Joe") is no stranger to films that shock people. His long list of credits include films that draw their terror from real life, creating a Dante-like Inferno for the charac-

ters: a man driven to using a power drill to kill people in *DRILLER KILLER*; a mute woman, an turned bloody vigilante after being raped twice in one day in *MS.45*; strippers brutally murdered in Times Square by a serial killer in *FEAR CITY*. In more recent years, Delia has scored Ferrara's *CHINA GIRL* and last year's sensation, *BAD LIEUTENANT*. He has also scored episodes of *WAR OF THE WORLDS* for television.

"This score is more textural and visceral than the first film," says Delia of *BODY SNATCHERS*. Carmen Dragon (father of "Captain" Daryl Dragon of *Captain and Tennille* fame) scored the 1956 original. "Dragon's approach was very 'film noir,'" says Delia. "We tried to stay away from the typical scary music. This score is synthesized with otherworldly sounds, which I think is good—it adds a different spin. The first film was more psychological than rock 'em shock 'em, although it was very, very scary. The new one remains true to that. It's not 'Freddy Krueger' at all; it's much more subtle. Of course, there are a few moments that will send people through the roof. What I tried to create with this score was a composition that goes beyond music. There's one theme—the pod theme—which keeps appearing throughout. It's a throbbing, droning, bubbling musical bed that will make the film very scary."

"With *BODY SNATCHERS*, my music coproducer Peter Fish [who also wrote additional music for the film] and I abandoned the traditional approach to film scoring. We were



**FOR LOVE OF MONEY's Gabrielle Anwar undergoes an unpleasant transformation in *BODY SNATCHERS*, Abel Ferrara's take on the science fiction classic.**

brought in early in the game, working with rough cuts for a long time, getting ideas and themes together. Abel likes to have a lot of options."

"In terms of musical keys, rhythm and tone, our approach was completely non-conventional," says Fish. "There's an internal logic to the score in that it comments very specifically on every scene and was composed—because of the new technology available at National Sound—with a great sense of creative freedom."

With *BODY SNATCHERS* the music was married to the effects. "With some cues, it was difficult to decipher what were sound effects and what was score," says Delia. "That was the nature of the film."

Delia's scores for Ferrara always end up being part of the film's guts. If that means the music doesn't work as well without the film, that's fine

with Delia. "The music needs to serve the film first and foremost, everything else is secondary," he says. A case in point is one of his favorite scores, for Ferrara's *MS. 45*. In that film, the "internal logic" of Delia's music, described by Fish, is borne out; music is used sparingly as a direct texture to the film's more intense scenes. The music and images *need* one another to create the desired effect for the viewer.

That doesn't mean Delia's music can't be heard outside of a film. Between scores, Delia assembled the rock band, "Killer Joe." Their album *Scene of the Crime* is a masterpiece of blues rock, whose roots can be traced back to Delia's hard-driving songs for *FEAR CITY* and *CHINA GIRL*. The legend of the band's name, and Delia's moniker, is twofold—the title is a tribute to both the great jazz-era hooper "Killer" Joe Piro and the famous song "Killer Joe." *Scene of the Crime* also had the distinction of being played in outer space: the album is a favorite of astronaut Jim Wetherbee, commander of the Space Shuttle *Columbia*, who told MTV in a live interview from orbit that he was listening to it while on a mission.

Ultimately, Delia enjoys manipulating the audience via music. There's power to it—deciding whether a particular approach will make someone scream. But Delia is ever aware that restraint is the better part of scoring.

"Sometimes," says Delia, "silence is the best way to scare the hell out of people." □

**When not composing scores for director Abel Ferrara, "Killer" Joe Delia performs and records blues-influenced rock-and-roll with his band, "Killer Joe."**





## HOUSE OF HORRORS

continued from page 33

connoisseur, thus enhancing the work he does on his Dungeon creations. Besides viewing his handiwork, visitors leave with a sense that they've experienced a bit of film history. □

## ATTACK OF THE 50-FT WOMAN

continued from page 7  
painstaking."

The five-foot, ten-inch actress also didn't have a problem relating to her character's oversized height. "When she first grows, she's self-conscious and kind of awkward about it and feels a bit embarrassed, and I've gone through times like that. I sort of perfected the way of standing to shrink about four or five inches. Holding my body, my arms and my hips to make myself a little smaller. Inevitably, the boys who you have crushes on are always a little shorter than you. I'm only 5'10", which isn't that tall, but it's tall enough to be out of the running for a lot of movies with good actors." □

## RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD III

continued from page 18

square spaces because it's tough to get actors to do anything in there, and I tried to design the sets to take care of very specific action. I had to have the kids see what was happening inside, so by putting ventilation slits in the steel walls, they could be outside and still look through. Also, it made for a good lighting source."

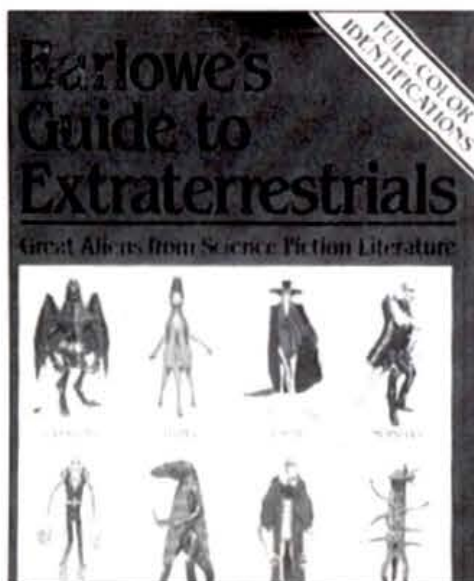
Tremblay's one regret about the interchangeability of his sets is that they ended up in MONOLITH. "Unfortunately, they got carted away and rented out," he says. "When I heard that, I was really shocked. They were meant to be changed significantly, but from what I heard, they weren't changed enough." □

## BOXING HELENA

continued from page 59

to see if they're home. We've all come at least that close to being where Nick is; Nick just didn't get the things we got as children that stop us from taking those steps further. Because of that, I felt it was important to get the audience in a place of comfort watching other people. Also, I didn't want, through the direction, to tell people how to feel. I'm not here to preach a 12-step program for obsession; all I'm here to do is invite people into the best place that I can so that I can tell them this great thing. They may say, 'That stinks!' but I showed it to them in the best way I could." □

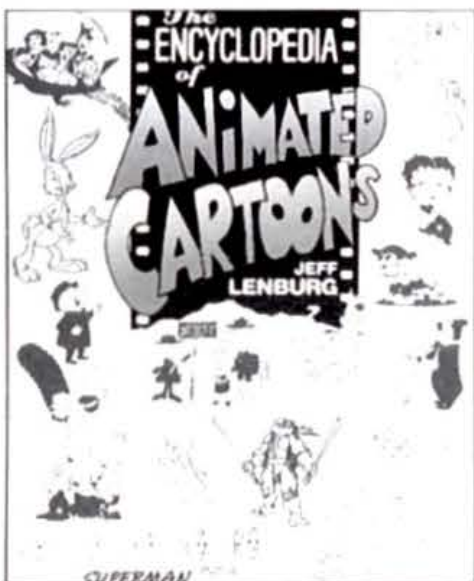
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# LETTERS

## BRAND NAME EGO

After the malicious and pointlessly nasty review of SLEEPWALKERS, you want an interview? You're living in a dream world. Please go away and don't write me any more letters.

Stephen King  
Bangor, ME

*(Due to an unfortunate typographical error, my capsule comments for SLEEPWALKERS (23:1:61) gave the impression that I disliked your film. What I actually wrote was, "At last, a cinematic masterpiece which surpasses even CITIZEN KANE in terms of sheer unadulterated brilliance! King's script re-defines the craft of screenwriting as we know it"—not! Actually, you're the one living in a dream world, apparently thinking that film journalism is some form of prostitution: you "pay" us by granting an interview; then we lie back and say, "Oh, Stephen, you're the best!" Next time, if you want a favorable review, try writing a good script.)*

## SUGGESTION BOX

The first issue of IMAGI-MOVIES was terrific. If it sells well, please consider publishing it bi-monthly. It seems to be mostly a horror magazine, and I would like it to cover every horror TV show, miniseries, and theatrical and direct-to-video horror movie. I am not a fan of Japanimation, and I would like IMAGI-MOVIES to do little if any coverage of that. Let CFQ do it. Do cover horror comic book movies like THE CROW.

Ideally, I wish that CFQ would focus on science-fiction, fantasy, and animation. Then let IMAGI-MOVIES cover horror. It is annoying to see so many movies and TV shows that nobody is covering. With a few changes, CFQ's coverage of SF and fantasy could be complete, and IMAGI-MOVIES' coverage of Horror could be complete.

Herbie Young  
Louisburg, NC 27548

I recently purchased your first issue. Excellent job! I really liked your article on THE WANDERING KID—fascinating stuff. I have a request. Do you think it's possible, in the near future, that you might do an article on the television series THE ADVENTURES OF BRISCO COUNTY, JR?

John Ian Sharpe

Colton, CA 92324

I have been a subscriber for over 20 years, and I just subscribed to your new magazine, IMAGI-MOVIES. I hope it fills the void that CFQ has created as it has changed in recent years. You have stopped the "Coming" features and the full-page reviews almost completely, instead covering behind-the-scenes details of mass-market trash, ad nauseum—sequels and huge-budget mainstream animation or fantasy films which are a far cry from your original concept.

I prefer a high-quality magazine which devotes long articles only to those movies which over time have proven worthy of such coverage—either by virtue of their excellence of content (i.e., THE WICKER MAN) or their success in the market place (i.e., ALIEN). To devote one-third of an issue to ROBOCOP III before it comes out seems a waste, as most sequels, horror or otherwise, are awful, regardless of their special effects.

I hope the new mag will focus on the smaller films, like MIKEY or GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE or THE BROOD, which scare you without wallowing in gore. Suspense is the key to a great horror film.

Paul Klinger  
Granada Hills, CA 91344

*(Suggestions are always welcome, so keep them coming. Implementing them, however, is sometimes a little difficult, so please cut us some slack if we don't comply immediately. (1) Bi-monthly publication is our eventual goal, but it will take some time to get up to speed. (2) Splitting up coverage between CFQ and IM according to genre is interesting but a little impractical, because of the difficulty in labeling some films. A good example is THE WANDERING KID, which Mr. Young would prefer us to ignore, because it's Japanimation; on the other hand, he wants us to cover everything in horror, and WANDERING KID is nothing if not horrific. At any rate, I'm too big a fan of films like 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY and BLADE RUNNER to ignore science-fiction entirely. Still, we will be able to cover a lot of horror that has been squeezed out of CFQ's pages by STAR TREK. (3) I, too, prefer long articles on films which have proven worthy of such coverage, but don't expect us to ignore current films*

*entirely. Some of those are worthy of attention, too.)*

## CORRECTION BOX

I enjoyed the debut issue of IMAGI-MOVIES. The articles and critiques were intelligent and informative. But what else would you expect from a CINEFANTASTIQUE relative? I am pleased and intrigued by a format that will focus on low-budget, classic, and obscure films, rather than the typically lavish, highly-typed Hollywood product. The first issue had a bit too much emphasis on Stephen King-inspired material for my palate. Though Mr. King is undeniably a virtual industry, King-related films are hardly obscure and rarely low-budget.

SF aficionados are notoriously meticulous about specific details, such as release dates. John Thonen refers to THIS ISLAND EARTH as a 1954 release. THIS ISLAND EARTH's premier was in 1955. The Roger Corman piece was excellent, but a photo caption makes reference to FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND as "his first directorial effort in 22 years." This is inaccurate, as 19 years passed between VON RICHTHOFEN AND BROWN (1971) and FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND (1990).

Timothy M. Walters  
Muskogee, OK

In his review of the new BODY SNATCHERS, Mark Altman belittles Meg Tilly in a way that falls outside the realm of opinion. It's clear that he doesn't think much of her, and that's his right. But when he states that Tilly is "best known for her willingness to shed her clothes" he is committing an error of fact. Tilly has appeared nude in one previous film: THE GIRL IN A SWING. Perhaps Altman thinks he saw her nude in PSYCHO II or IMPULSE, but if so he is pathetically unable to recognize body doubles.

Is Altman so ignorant of mainstream movies that he has never seen THE BIG CHILL, AGNES OF GOD, VALMONT, THE TWO JAKES or the recent LEAVING NORMAL. Tilly appeared prominently in these and many others. She appeared nude in none of them. Now she has apparently started taking off her clothes, but she is hardly "best known" for such a new development.

What infuriates me is that Altman is trying to support his personal dislike of Tilly by insinuating, falsely, that she has compensated for a lack of talent by showing her body. I hate to use the Academy Awards as a symbol of excellence, but often they do represent the work for which an actress is "best known." Tilly was nominated for an Oscar for AGNES OF GOD, a film in which the only flesh she displayed was her face peering out of a wimple.

I'm defending more than just Meg Tilly's "reputation." I'm defending the right of any actress to "shed her clothes"—for any reason, artistic or mercenary, that seems good to her—without phony-superior smirking from the peanut gallery. Nudity has a place in films. It can have great resonance and can call up much more complicated emotions than simple arousal. CINEFANTASTIQUE and its off-shoots are supposed to be the authoritative sources for information about genre films and their production. Slam who you want, but get the facts straight. And cut some slack for actresses who take chances "exposing themselves" in this intense and often demeaning zone of film-making.

Robert Benson  
Santa Monica, CA 90403

*(IM would like to thank Mr. Walters and Mr. Benson for setting the record straight. One small note for Mr. Walters: Ed Naha's THE FILMS OF ROGER CORMAN lists VON RICHTHOFEN as 1970, not 1971, making it a 20 year gap until UNBOUND. As for Mr. Benson, a quick check of THE BAREFACTS VIDEO GUIDE, an essential reference for this kind of thing, confirms his statements about Tilly's previously appearing nude only once. And rest assured that, in the future, we will "cut some slack for actresses who take chances.")*

## ERRATA

Our review of SOLAR CRISIS last issue mis-identified the film's pseudonymous director Alan Smithee as producer Richard Edlund. It was actually Richard C. Serafian who adopted the DGA's officially sanctioned alias, which can only be used when a director establishes that a film has been so badly altered that it no longer represents his work.



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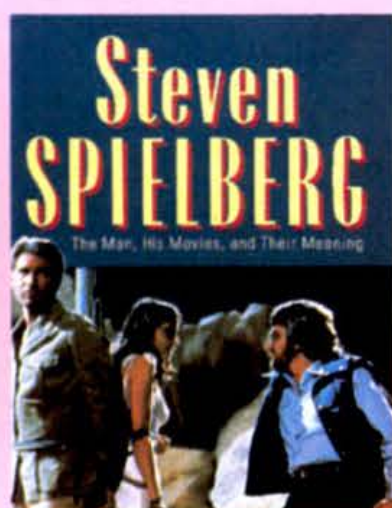
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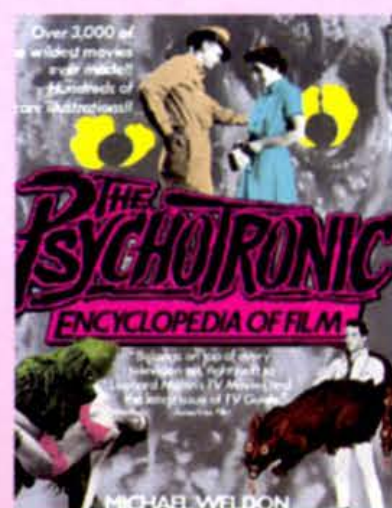
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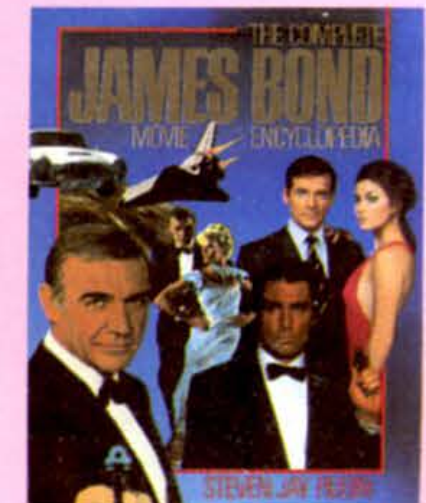
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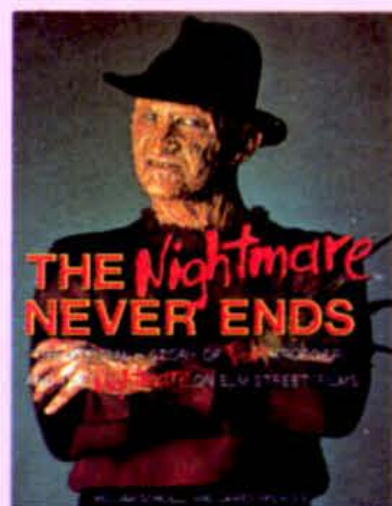
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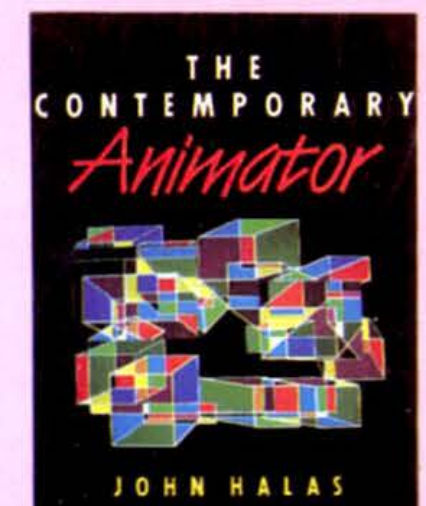
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